

Tests

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How not to waste money

There's a lot of advice in this issue about how to avoid being ripped off.

No-one wants to arrange a funeral, but it's even worse if you feel the financial side is out of your control. The article on page 28 details exactly what's involved, what sort of costs to expect and how to make sure you don't get any nasty surprises.

Termite damage to your home can cost you thousands of dollars, so it makes sense to avoid it if possible by having frequent inspections. But, as the article on page 16 explains, a licence is no guarantee of an experienced, well-trained inspector, and it's not unknown for two different inspectors to give completely opposite advice — with potentially disastrous consequences.

There's no easy answer to this — you have to do your homework and dig deep for information when choosing a pest inspector. This month's article outlines all the issues involved and what you need to ask before you fork out your money.

But the biggest waste of money highlighted in this issue is detox kits. Despite the current fad, there's no real evidence that you need to detox at all — your body is quite capable of eliminating 'toxins' of its own accord. And a quick 'detox' isn't a quick fix for a whole year of eating badly, smoking or drinking too much.

Most of the detox kits at least offer sensible advice on diet and healthy lifestyle changes — though no different from anything we don't all know already, even if we don't always follow it. Save yourself the money and give detox kits a miss.



Jane Mackenzie,
Editor

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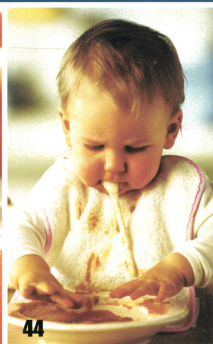
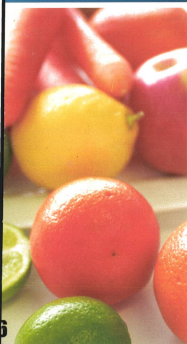
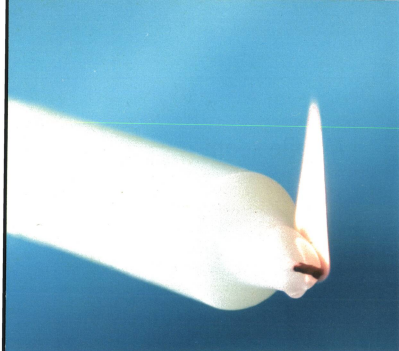
Look out for the  symbol in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info on CHOICEextra. This month you can calculate what capacity of air conditioner you need to cool your particular room.

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Photo: Gene Ross

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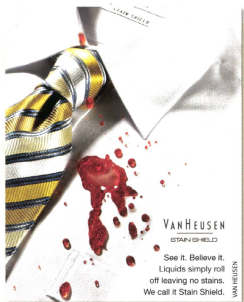
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A non-stick shirt?

The **VAN HEUSEN Stain Shield** shirt (\$59.95) is treated with Teflon and is claimed to repel oil- and water-based liquid stains. If it works, it would be great for those occasions when you manage to throw cappuccino all over your clean white shirt just before an important meeting.

To put it to the test, we dropped red wine, coffee, bolognese sauce and motor oil on a new **Stain Shield** shirt (washed once). We did the same to a **Stain Shield** shirt that'd been washed 50 times — equivalent to about one year's wear — and, for comparison, to a **VAN HEUSEN** shirt without the Teflon treatment (\$44.95).

Both the Teflon-treated shirts repelled the water-based red wine and coffee exceptionally well. They beaded on the fabric and most rolled right off. The remaining beads of liquid were blotted up with a cloth, leaving no easily visible stain. The non-treated shirt stained and needed to be soaked overnight to remove it.

However, the bolognese sauce and motor oil stained all the shirts. The non-treated shirt in fact fared a little better than the other two with the bolognese, ending up with a less noticeable stain after blotting and rinsing. The sauce eventually came out of all the shirts, but only after soaking them overnight in a stain remover. Not surprisingly, the stain from the motor oil didn't come out of any of the shirts — but hopefully you won't be doing too much motor mechanic work in your white business shirt. However, the oil stain didn't spread quite as much on the Teflon shirts.

In case you're wondering how comfortable a Teflon shirt might be to wear, we used a standard test for 'breathability' to check. The good news is that a wearer is unlikely to feel any difference between it and a non-treated shirt.

The verdict? If you have a habit of spilling stuff on your shirt the extra \$15 for the **Stain Shield** might be worthwhile as a trade-off for saving you from embarrassment.

Mobile spam

Unsolicited commercial messages, more commonly called spam, have become the scourge of email inboxes everywhere. Now we're also beginning to see it on mobile phones — and if you're not careful it could end up costing you money.

Computer CHOICE magazine recently heard from Matthew, who began receiving SMS messages on his phone from a number beginning with 19. The message read: "Hi, it's Susan ... wanna catch up?" Matthew knew a Susan and replied to the message, but it soon became clear it wasn't the right Susan. Over the next few days he received three more messages.

Matthew found he was unknowingly a subscriber to a premium SMS chat service, and was charged \$4.55 each time he received a message. "It doesn't require me to answer, or open the SMS — I get charged regardless," he said.

Under the Spam Act 2003, you must give express consent to receive commercial SMS messages, although consent may also be inferred from an existing relationship with the business. Matthew has never signed on for the chat service, nor used his phone for a subscription service (such as where you pay for content like ringtones or wallpaper to be delivered to your phone), where he'd have had to sign up as part of the terms and conditions, thus creating an opportunity for his sign-up details to be misused. In his case it seems his number was simply used by an unscrupulous company.

While many subscription services are reputable, read the fine print carefully, as not all companies act responsibly. You

Dummy danger

Kerrie-Ann Parsons of Townsville wrote to us about an alarming incident when her son was using a **NUK Starlight Silicone Soother** (dummy) — see the photo, right. She went to check on six-month-old Alexander, who was settling down to sleep, and found him choking on the dummy, which he'd managed to get fully into his mouth.

We've since come across another case involving the same model of dummy: six-month-old Jonah Hedges of Melbourne was found with the whole dummy in his mouth, and though he wasn't choking it gave his mother Gayle a fright.

We examined the dummy against the Australian standard and found the shield doesn't meet certain requirements designed to prevent this sort of thing happening. The



may find you're agreeing to let your phone number be on sold to other companies or that you're paying for a service you don't want or need.

If you find yourself in this situation, read to the end of a message, where there may be a 1300 phone number that you can call to unsubscribe, or you may be able to text "STOP". If not, your mobile phone company is the starting point to resolve the problem.

If the situation isn't resolved and you're still being charged, contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman at www.tio.com.au. The TIO can't handle complaints about the content of messages, but it can help with billing issues. Matthew lodged a complaint on its website and was advised to call his phone company on a specific customer-service line. When he did so and explained the situation, the charges were removed from his account. The TIO also told him that if you dispute the charges, you don't have to pay them until the matter is settled.

If you'd like to subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



Want to work for CHOICE?

If you live in Sydney and are looking for part-time casual work that's both interesting and challenging, CHOICE and CHOICE Online could have just the job for you.

We're looking for someone to check data and reports for publication. You need strong numerical skills and an eye for detail. You'll probably have a degree in a science or technology field and/or wide-ranging employment experience where such skills have been developed.

It's vital that you have excellent communication and negotiation skills, both oral and written, and that you demonstrate maturity, judgment and meticulous attention to detail, without being dogmatic. An understanding of quality assurance principles, an interest in consumer issues and the ability to be flexible about work times are also important.

Employment is on a project-by-project basis and may be intermittent. It will mainly consist of end-point quality checking ('verification') of data, reports and articles on a range of consumer topics, such as health insurance, phone plans and computer tests. Pay is around \$25 per hour, depending on skills and experience. Please note that you need to be able to work at our offices in Marrickville to do this job.

For more information about the job, call (02) 9577 3227, email verifier@choice.com.au or send your application addressing the above criteria to Barbara Manchester, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, marked 'Casual verifier position'. Please have your applications in by October 14, 2005.

standard isn't mandatory, however, and the company doesn't make any labelling claims about meeting the Australian standard.

NUK says Alexander was at, or slightly past, the recommended age for the size 1 dummy he was using (which is for 0-6-month-olds), and should have been using the next size up (size 2, for 6-18-month-olds). Jonah was also using a size 1. However, the shield has the same dimensions for sizes 1 and 2 (only the teat gets slightly larger), so the areas where the dummy didn't meet the standard's requirements remain the same. We don't think a larger teat would be enough to prevent the whole dummy going into a baby's mouth.

The company argues that the dummy has

two holes in the shield, so if it blocked the throat, the baby would still be able to breathe air flowing through them. We suspect most parents won't want to take the chance.

The main lessons to be learnt from Alexander's and Jonah's experiences are:

- Buy a dummy that meets the Australian standard (look for the logo on packaging).
- Get one with a large shield (though not so large it hurts your baby's nose or cheeks).
- Make sure the ring sits away from the shield so it can be easily gripped to remove the dummy.
- Don't leave young babies unsupervised if they're unable to remove a dummy themselves.
- There are no reports we could find of babies choking on their thumbs!

Can you help? INVESTING IN RETIREMENT

We all strive for financial independence in retirement, but how can you make it happen? Please let our sister magazine, *CHOICE Money & Rights*, know about your experiences. For example, are you retired with an investment portfolio? Do you invest in managed or direct investments?

Contact us at **Retirement investments**, *CHOICE Money & Rights*, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email retirement_invest@choice.com.au.

Wipe and chuck?

According to a recent newspaper report in the US, consumers in North America bought around 83,000 tons of disposable wipes last year. That's about 9000 18-wheel semi-trailers full; about 30% of these were meant for home cleaning. With ever more disposable cleaning products available on Australian supermarket shelves, we're certainly following this trend.

Where there used to be just a few baby wash cloths and moistened towelettes for personal use, there's now a disposable wipe for every conceivable purpose, including a vast variety for cleaning virtually every room and surface in the home or office — wipes for kitchen and bathroom surfaces, antibacterial ones to kill germs wherever they might lurk, flushable ones for toilet cleaning, wipes infused with furniture polish or with glass and mirror cleaner, wet ones for various floor surfaces, and dry, electrostatically charged ones for floors and dusting.

Here at CHOICE we've so far received very little comment from subscribers on disposable cleaning wipes, though every time we report on disposable nappies some readers are quick to send us emails and letters, concerned about their environmental impact.

Because disposable wipes have only

been around for a few years, there's as yet little data on their long-term effects on the environment. But producing them obviously requires energy and creates packaging waste, and distributing them relies largely on fossil fuels. And it's clear that the more of these we use, the more waste we create, which requires more landfill space. Few products are flushable or compostable — they're generally made of non-woven, synthetic material that's sometimes mixed with wood pulp.

The use-and-chuck nature of disposable wipes clearly challenges 'reduce, reuse and recycle' thinking on waste minimisation. True enough, wet floor wipes can help reduce our water use for floor-washing, as wipe manufacturers point out. However, they still create more waste for landfill, unless you currently use paper towels and sprays for all your cleaning.

Convenience is the obvious *raison d'être* for disposable cleaning wipes, but convenience has a price. A 500 mL bottle of glass or general-purpose spray cleaner can be bought for less than \$4 (even less when it's on special, or for a refill bottle); the wipes pictured range from just under 10 cents to more than 70 cents per wipe. No need to say which option's friendlier to your hip pocket.



The kitchen/general purpose and flushable toilet-cleaning wipes pictured are around 10–12 cents per wipe; the glass wipes cost around 15 cents each, the furniture ones around 25 cents and, for the floor, you can pay anything from around 30 cents for a dry wipe to 74 cents for a wet wipe. You can even get a 'cleaning system' (previously called a mop) for \$32.68 that requires wet or dry refills, or special dusters (\$7.98) with replacement heads (five for \$6.47). And while you're at it, don't forget that pack of disposable toilet bowl scrubbers with built-in cleaners (\$4.18) and refills (six for \$5.58). (Prices quoted are what we found in June 2005.)

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

GERMAN DOGS MARK I — Tracing dog poo

The dogs of Dresden could soon land their owners in a great big pile of trouble if they aren't careful, reports *The Guardian*. According to the UK paper, politicians in this eastern German city want to force the owners of the city's 12,000 dogs to register their dogs for compulsory DNA tests, "so that any careless deposit on a pavement or in a park can be tested and traced to the animal responsible, triggering a hefty fine for its registered owner". Apparently, many local dog owners have proved unwilling to brandish a plastic bag or 'pooper scooper' to clean up after their pets, reports the paper. And before you think it's a joke, the article appeared in *The Guardian* in late March, not on April 1.

GERMAN DOGS MARK II — Travelling in cars

On more serious dog matters, Germany's *Test* magazine reminds readers that all animals travelling unsecured in a car pose a significant risk in an accident and should therefore be secured appropriately. In a crash at 48 km/h, *Test* points out, even a road atlas would be thrown from the parcel shelf to the front of the car with a force equivalent to 150 kg. A large dog of 60 kg would hit passengers sitting in the front with a force equivalent to 3 tonnes, endangering their own and the passenger's life.

BANANA ARMOUR

Annoyed by bruised bananas in your lunch pack? *Which?* magazine in the UK found the BananaGuard, a plastic, banana-shaped case, designed to fit most bananas. It has many small holes for ventilation, a sturdy locking mechanism and sells from bananaguard-uk.com for about \$10 (for standard colours) or about \$11 (for glow in the dark).

yourletters

Unscrupulous sales tactics



My 82-year-old mother is partially deaf, has failing eyesight and lives alone. One Saturday afternoon she was door-knocked about purchasing a 3 mobile phone.

Told it would cost her \$9 per month, she repeatedly said she wasn't interested. The salesperson then phoned his supervisor and they both entered the house.

The second man told her the calls were only \$7 per month and pressured her to buy the phone for security reasons. Mishearing the company name 'three', she thought the men said the phone was free. She thought the only way to get them to leave would be to sign up for a phone.

When my sister looked at the contract she discovered that the handset would cost \$7 a month for two years, and my mother would be committed to \$10 worth of calls each month.

My mother hadn't been left a cancellation notice as stipulated on the form, nor had she been supplied with 3's pricing brochure. She said the salesman had just ticked the boxes on the back page without explaining them. She thought she'd be paying the amount at the post office, but the salesman had got her Visa debit card details from her and entered them.

My sister rang 3's cancellation service, complaining about the unscrupulous sales tactics of two of their staff. It cancelled the contract, and my sister received a verbal apology from the consultant on the line.

How anyone can pressure an 82-year-old to buy a mobile phone is disgraceful. This experience has damaged my mother's confidence in her ability to manage living alone.

**Name and address withheld
Victoria**

We informed **HUTCHISON TELECOMS (3)**, which offered a full apology and forwarded a copy of the above letter to its heads of Retail Sales and Learning and Development as an example of the negative effect of non-compliance with consumer laws.

The letter writer says her mother didn't wish to hear from 3 again so it was unable to make a personal apology.

If you've got a complaint against any phone company, contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman on 1800 062 058 or go to www.tio.com.au.

Suspect salons

As a nail technician and educator, I'm concerned about the number of nail salons popping up all over Australia. Many of them employ staff with no formal training, and use dangerous substances banned

in the USA. Their products may not comply with labelling laws. Some salons may also disregard basic hygiene and infection control.

There is no regulation for the nail industry, unlike in the USA, where a licence is required before charging someone money for a professional service. It's not compulsory for training courses for nail technicians to be accredited in Victoria, so even backyard training schools have begun to appear.

The nail industry is starting to peak. I hope these practices don't lead it to slide downhill, with clients needing minor surgery to repair seriously harmed fingers and toes.

**Christine Maher
Preston, Victoria**

We spoke to the Australian Professional Fingernail Association (APFA), which also expressed concern about some salons' unhygienic practices, including the use of foot spas that aren't properly disinfected, and poorly skilled nail technicians unnecessarily cutting clients' skin, causing bleeding and even infection. A microbiologist confirmed there may be a low risk of transmitting blood-borne viruses such as hepatitis C through the use of unsterilised instruments that penetrate the skin and, even more likely, staphylococcal and streptococcal infections if the skin is cut. Another risk is the spread of *Pseudomonas* bacterial infection,

THUMBS UP!



I Helen Donovan, via email, awards a

'Thumbs Up' to **SWATCH**. When the casing holding snapped on the **SWATCH** her children had given her for Mother's Day last year, **SWATCH** happily replaced it with a brand-new identical one, even though she had no receipt. She says she feels as though she's wearing the watch she was given, and so do her children.

which can be transmitted by dirty implements and turns the nail an alarming shade of green.

APFA also expressed concern about reports of salons that use methyl methacrylate (MMA), a very cheap product that sticks false nails so strongly to the nail bed that it can cause infection, allergy or even permanent damage to real nails. This has been an issue in the US.

To avoid dubious practitioners, ask the technician about their qualifications, and tell them you want to see the salon's Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) to check what chemicals they use. Workplaces using chemicals are required by law to have MSDS available to staff. Also ask the nail technician to disinfect their implements in front of you. According to the NSW Department of Health, any instrument that could penetrate the skin ought to be sterilised in an autoclave to kill viruses.

If you have any further queries, call APFA on 1300 309 036 or go to www.apfa.net.au. You can report any salons that appear to have dangerous practices to your local council.

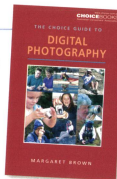
The NSW Department of Health has a fact sheet about manicure and pedicure treatments at www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2004/nailpedicure_fs.html.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, who wrote to us about unscrupulous mobile phone sales tactics, receives *THE CHOICE Guide to Digital Photography*, or any other book of their choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 47–48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



Toxin twaddle

Move over Atkins — detox is the hottest fad in town.

IN A NUTSHELL

- There's no sound evidence that we need to 'detox', or that following a detox program will increase the elimination of toxins from your body.
- Some detox kits have diet plans that are unnecessarily restrictive, and give dietary advice with poor or no rationale.
- Detox supplements provide little or no known benefit over a healthy diet. We suggest you save your money.
- A week or two on a detox program won't absolve you from a year of unhealthy eating, smoking or drinking too much alcohol.

Been burning the candle at both ends? 'Detox' or 'liver cleansing' diets have been around for years. Put simply, their intended effect is to purge the body of a supposed build-up of toxins, in order to regain good health. Some of these diets require enormous dedication (just reading the *Sandra Cabot's Liver Cleansing Diet* book could take you weeks). But these days, it's claimed you need only purchase a detox kit from the shelves of your local healthfood store, chemist or supermarket, swallow some supplements and follow their dietary guidelines, and in most cases within three weeks you're 'cleansed'.

To gauge the popularity of detoxing, we asked CHOICE Onliners if they'd ever tried to 'detox' (for example by using detox kits or a detox diet), and 30% of the more than 1000 respondents said 'yes'. Detox kits certainly seem popular — according to the manufacturer's website, half a million QUICK CLEANSE kits have been sold in Australia since the product was launched in 1998. But do they work, and is it really necessary to detox in the first place?

WHY DETOX?

To help answer this question, we first bought seven widely available detox kits (see *Detox kits reviewed*, below right) and took a look at what they said about it. In the literature provided, most of these kits refer to the large number of toxins — from cigarette smoke, exhaust fumes and pesticides to caffeine, alcohol and medicinal drugs — that our bodies are exposed to in today's world (see *What's a toxin?*, below right, for more).

They talk of how toxins accumulate in the body, and of the extra burden this places on the body's natural detoxification mechanisms. And they point the finger at this toxic overload as being behind a host of ills including constipation, bloating, flatulence, poor digestion, heartburn, diarrhoea, lack of energy and fatigue.

The kits claim that their detox products "stimulate your body's natural detoxifying functions", "improve the functioning of your digestive system", "work like an intestinal broom", "flush away potentially harmful toxins from your system" and generally give your body a "spring clean" to provide relief from these problems, improve your general health and wellbeing and leave you feeling revitalised.

PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

SO DO WE REALLY NEED TO DETOX?

The short answer is 'no'. As many of the kits themselves point out, our bodies are well-equipped with self-cleansing mechanisms, and detoxification occurs on a continual basis in the body — the lungs, kidneys, liver, gastrointestinal tract, skin and immune system all play a part in effectively removing or eliminating toxins.

Symptoms like bloating and fatigue may be an indication of an unhealthy lifestyle, or a lack of vital nutrients because of poor eating habits — not of toxic build-up. For example, constipation, bloating and flatulence can all result from a lack of fibre.

And claims that physical side effects of the detox programs like coated tongue, bad breath, fatigue and various aches and pains are evidence that your body is getting rid of toxins just aren't sustainable. HILDE HEMMES' HERBALS, for example, claims that body odour as a side effect of its program "is a good sign as it is the result of toxic elimination". In fact this and nail-polish-remover-smelling breath are

both symptoms of your body burning fat while you're on a low-carbohydrate diet (as is recommended by **HILDA HEMMES** in particular). You can lose a similar amount of body fat by following any calorie-restricted diet, but a more balanced, less extreme one won't have these side effects.

The bottom line is that no studies have shown that a detox regimen increases the elimination of toxins.

At around \$50 a kit in general (plus other recommended purchases — see *Wallet watch*, page 11, for more) they aren't cheap, so what are you getting for your money?

LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE

There's no shortage of glowing testimonials from people who've used detox kits, claiming to feel cleansed, energised and healthier. But when we went searching, evidence-based research to support the testimonials was thin on the ground.

First we asked the manufacturers of the seven detox kits we'd bought to supply evidence for the efficacy of their products, but none volunteered any, most citing commercial confidentiality as a reason.

Failing this, we went to other sources — scientific literature and experts in the field (dietitians, gastroenterologists, doctors and a pharmacologist/toxicologist) for the detox lowdown.

DETOX KIT DIETS

Most of the kits we looked at acknowledge that poor diet contributes to the kind of health problems they say are symptoms of a toxic overload, and they all include some kind of dietary guidelines or meal plan for you to follow as part of the detox program. Given the importance of diet for good health, we asked a panel of dietitians to review and comment on the quality of information provided.

Our experts were positive about aspects of some kits' diet plans:

- Several acknowledge the need for making long-term lifestyle changes, or advise you to maintain sensible eating through the year.
- Some kits provide meal plans, recipes and/or give practical information and advice for shopping or eating out, which can be helpful.
- The majority give at least some healthy lifestyle recommendations, such as increasing activity, ensuring you drink enough water, and improving your diet (by eating more fruit and veg, for example).
- Probably the most logical piece of advice given is to avoid what the kits define as 'toxins' in the first place — so for these programs alcohol, cigarettes and coffee are out — as well as saturated and trans fats, soft drinks and refined sugary foods.



DETOX KITS REVIEWED

(In alphabetical order; prices are an average of the retail prices we saw in stores in March 2005)

A. VOGEL Cleansing Program (15 days)	\$57
BLACKMORES Detox Program (10 days)	\$55
BRAUER Elimitona Slim & Detox Programme (20 days)	\$27
HERRON ActiCleanse Detox Program (14 days)	\$57
HILDE HEMMES' HERBALS Detox Programs (six or 10 days)	\$50
NATURE'S OWN Rapid Cleanse Detox Plan (10 days)	\$60
QUICK CLEANSE Detox Program (15 days)	\$65

What's a toxin?

Dictionaries define a toxin as a poison produced by an organism, which causes disease. But detox kits cast the net wider to encompass any substance with the potential to harm your body.

When the kits mention toxins, they're mainly referring to those they categorise as environmental — alcohol, caffeine, medicinal and recreational drugs, cigarette smoke, heavy metals, exhaust fumes, pollution, 'chemicals', preservatives and pesticides, to name a few — which we're exposed to in the air and through our diets.

A couple of kits also mention free radicals — internal chemical by-products that can damage our body's cells if more are produced than are neutralised by the body's antioxidants.

Our detoxing guinea pigs

We wanted to see what impact detoxing would have on people's daily lives, so we recruited three volunteers for the task. Liz, Megan and Zac were each given one of the detox kits on review to try out.

Throughout the detox, they kept a diary recording their experiences. Some common themes ran throughout.

Both Zac and Liz struggled at the beginning, often feeling tired and lacking in energy. Zac had difficulty concentrating at work, and on several



Liz

occasions had to go to bed earlier than normal.

Megan commented on the expense of buying organic food (as recommended by her kit), and the need to be more organised than usual so that she had plenty of the 'allowed' foods at home and work.

And not surprisingly (considering the laxative effect of the fibre supplements the kits contain), they all experienced minor stomach troubles early on in the

program — something the kits do warn can happen.

Probably the biggest difficulty they faced was trying to fit the specific requirements of the detox program into their daily lives — remembering to take pills before, during and after meals, and particularly choosing suitable foods when out to dinner or at a barbecue with friends. For Liz, working in the catering industry and surrounded by food all day, commitment to her detox program was a real challenge.

On completion they all felt the detox they'd tried had had some benefits — Zac felt healthier, and Liz felt she had more energy. But all three agreed that they weren't sure what to put the improvements down to. As Megan said, "It feels like my body is functioning better, but it's hard to tell if that's due to supplements or a better diet, restricting unhealthy foods."

So did detoxing have a lasting impact?

We checked back with our detoxers two months later, and they each noted that they now try to drink more water and eat more fruit, vegies and healthier food in general. Certainly a positive outcome, but what they learnt was no different from the advice given in every sensible diet plan (or CHOICE food article, come to that). Do we really have to spend \$50+ and put ourselves through a probably unnecessary detox program before we take any notice?



Megan



Zac



Following these recommendations on their own is likely to result in clearer skin (the result of drinking more water), less bloating and lethargy (dietary restrictions are likely to result in you eating less), fewer headaches (reduced alcohol and caffeine) and generally feeling healthier.

But the kits' diet plans also had problems and/or limitations:

- Most of the programs recommend a restriction of key food groups (like red meat and dairy) but give no clear justification for this. Restricting these foods could mean there aren't enough of certain nutrients in the diet (particularly iron and calcium and possibly zinc and B vitamins) if the foods aren't replaced with suitable alternatives.
- None of the programs gives guidance on appropriate portion sizes.
- Some provide recommendations not supported by scientific evidence, or with no logical rationale, and/or give conflicting advice.

Here are some examples:

- Don't mix fruit and vegetables within the same meal. (A. VOGEL)
- Avoid table salt (but sea salt or herb salt are OK). (BLACKMORES and HERRON)
- Try to avoid eating after 8 pm. (BRAUER)
- Avoid citrus fruits (except lemons). (HERRON and QUICK CLEANSE)
- It's best to eat all raw and steamed vegetables later in the day. (QUICK CLEANSE)
- Avoid dairy products (but cheese and yogurt are suggested lunch options). (BRAUER)
- A vegetarian diet is recommended, but a small amount of fresh fish and poultry is preferable to red meat. Avoid pork. (A. VOGEL)

When trying to follow a diet plan, recommendations like these can be restrictive and some are certainly confusing.



Most of the diet plans were considered unlikely to cause any significant health problems if followed for the recommended timeframe. But **HILDE HEMMES' HERBALS Detox Program** is another story altogether. It's essentially a fast, where nothing but juice and some supplements (including a laxative and a diuretic) are consumed over six or 10 days. It was highlighted by our experts as being potentially dangerous for many people if followed for more than a couple of days.

DETOX KIT SUPPLEMENTS

The premise of the supplements is that to properly stimulate the detoxification process and eliminate waste from your body you need to give nature 'a helping hand'. Most of the kits contain a suite of supplements, the active ingredients (and the claimed effects) of which can broadly be classified as:

- **Liver tonics** (commonly milk thistle, barberry, dandelion or schizandra). These herbs have a long history of traditional use in detoxifying and protecting the liver and aiding normal liver function, but clinical evidence to support their use is limited and inconclusive.
- **Digestive aids** (such as ginger, globe artichoke and peppermint) for alleviating symptoms of indigestion.
- **Laxatives** (for example, fennel, psyllium and senna) and **diuretics** (such as birch, dandelion, golden rod and spiny retharrow), to increase bowel movements and urine elimination.

While there's evidence for the intended effects of some of the laxatives and diuretics, the experts we spoke to thought the suite of supplements included in the kits has little or no known benefit that wouldn't be achieved simply by following a healthy eating program. A high-fibre diet with plenty of water, for example, can have the same effect as taking laxatives and diuretics (with other nutritional benefits as a bonus).

WHEN DETOX IS A NO-NO

Children under 12 and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding shouldn't follow a detox program, as they have specific nutrition needs for growth and good health that detox programs don't necessarily cater for. If you have specific dietary requirements, a chronic illness or are on any type of medication, get medical advice before embarking on a program.

Also bear in mind that herbal preparations, like other drugs, can modify chemical processes in the body and interact with other medications, so always speak to your doctor before taking them. The kits all warn detoxers to stop using them or seek medical advice if they experience persistent side effects such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, joint pain, headaches, flu-like symptoms, stomach cramps or diarrhoea.

CHOICE'S VERDICT

We can all benefit from improving our diet and lifestyle — eating more fruit, vegies and whole grains and less fat, cutting back on junk foods, and only having caffeine and alcohol in moderation.

If 'detoxing' gets people thinking about their lifestyle, and springboards them into making positive long-term changes, OK. But the detox fad may encourage the idea that you can pollute your body as much as you like all year and then undo the damage in days — a theory that's very in tune with today's quick-fix mentality, but which unfortunately doesn't work.

You're better off saving your money and making small but sustainable diet and lifestyle changes that will benefit your health in the long term. ■

Wallet watch

Based on the recommendations in some of the kits, it seems a detox kit can be a useful marketing tool for some of a brand's other products. For example, the **BLACKMORES** kit suggests you consider taking extra vitamins and minerals when undergoing your detox, and naturally recommends its own brand. Totally Natural Products' **QUICK CLEANSE** kit tells you, "It's important to nourish your blood cells with nutrients immediately after completing the program", and that it sells the supplements you need. And the meal suggestions in **A. VOGEL's** detox program are based on its own-brand foods.

Most kits also recommend that you detox 'regularly' — **BRAUER** even goes so far as to suggest following its 10-day 'maintenance' plan every six weeks.

Detox kit manufacturers certainly don't waste the opportunity to let you know about other products they sell. There's clearly the potential for you to spend more money on the programs than just the cost of the kit.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

From very small to pretty bulky cameras.



IN A NUTSHELL

I You can get a digital camera that's small, stylish and functional for less than \$800.

There are 46 cameras under \$800 in our current test. They vary in shape from the largish conventional block with a right-hand grip to the more stylish slim, lightweight models. But don't let looks be your only guide when choosing a camera. There are good products that fit either description and it makes sense to consider a camera's function, not just its form.

WHY SIZE MATTERS

A small digital camera can deliver good image quality and all the functionality of a larger camera. However, while it's easy to be seduced by a sleek, slim design that looks good and won't test the stitching on your

pocket, small cameras are a really bad idea for some purposes.

I People with big hands may find the small buttons and close placement of controls difficult to use. This is especially important when trying to zoom in on a fleeting expression or manage a tricky close-up subject.

I A digital camera is crammed with delicate electrical features — while a small camera is handy to carry around, it won't respond well to hard knocks when carried carelessly in a bag or pocket.

I If you regularly take your camera to sports events or other situations where you need a long zoom lens, small and light cameras will present you with a stability problem. Generally, the lighter the camera, the harder it is to hold still. This is amplified dramatically as you extend a zoom to anything over 100 mm, and by the time you get to 190 mm or more a tripod is really the only sensible option — and there aren't many of those that'll fit in a pocket or handbag.

Even with larger, heavier cameras, always look for a solid support for the camera if you don't fancy carting a tripod around. Some cameras come with an image stabilisation feature that can help in some situations, but there's no substitute for keeping the camera absolutely still.

IMAGE STABILISATION

As well as it being harder to hold small, light digital cameras still, it's unfortunately in the nature of lenses to let in less light as their length increases, so you need to have the shutter open for longer — which makes it even more likely that shaky hands will give you a blurred image. For situations when you don't want to carry a tripod and can't find anything to rest the camera on, image stabilisation can be very useful.

Two basic stabilisation methods are used in still digital cameras: optical and best shot selector (BSS). Optical uses a combination of a fast-spinning gyroscope, a microprocessor that detects movement and sometimes a 'floating optical element' to reduce the effects of shaky hands. BSS takes a number of images when the shutter is pressed and the camera selects the one with the best sharpness.

Generally, optical image stabilisation tends to give better results, but both are better than nothing. Conversely, neither is as good as a rock-solid tripod.

What to buy

The top three cameras are all five megapixels. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by the manufacturers in August 2005.



CANON POWERSHOT S2 IS

Price: \$799

It has the top overall score in this under-\$800 price range, mainly because it's very versatile and easy to use. However, its image quality scores are lower than the **NIKON Coolpix 5900** and **OLYMPUS C-55 Zoom** in the *What to buy* list. This may be a factor of the very long (12x) zoom range, which will no doubt require the use of its optical image stabilisation feature when nearing full magnification.

It has a short shutter delay (0.35 seconds) and takes around 2.37 seconds to go from switched off to ready to take a photo ('start-up'), which means you probably won't miss too many unexpected shots.

It's bigger and heavier than the **NIKON** and **OLYMPUS**, but has a rounded shape that will appeal to some. It also has a monitor that can be rotated to avoid glare.



OLYMPUS C-55 ZOOM

Price: \$549

Although its design is more angular than the **CANON S2 IS** and **NIKON**, this is a practical camera.

Its overall score is the same as the **NIKON Coolpix 5900** but its combination of a reasonably long zoom as well as both manual and automatic functions make it more versatile. It's easy to use and has a relatively short shutter delay (0.44 seconds) and a quick start-up time (2.28 seconds).



NIKON COOLPIX 5900

Price: \$549

Don't let its small size and weight deceive you. When it comes to picture quality this is one of the better performers at this price, particularly in manual mode.

However, despite having 15 exposure programs, the **NIKON** lacks some manual functions and has a shorter zoom range than the top **CANON** and **OLYMPUS**, making it less versatile. Also, its shutter delay is slightly longer than theirs (0.52 seconds) and its start-up time is around one second longer (3.55 seconds).

FLAT, SMALL AND LIGHT



CANON DIGITAL IXUS 40

Price: \$599

This is a slim 3.9 megapixel camera with good image quality, especially in manual mode; it rates next overall after the other three profiled models.

Its zoom isn't as long as the other three, and like the **NIKON** it lacks some manual functions. Its shutter delay (0.4 seconds) is between the **CANON S2 IS** and **OLYMPUS** and it's the quickest to start up (2.18 seconds).

Notes for table overleaf

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following scores:

- Image quality (auto and manual are equal): 30%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Versatility: 12%
- Viewfinder/monitor: 12%
- Battery life: 10%
- Flash: 8%
- Movie quality: 3%

2-8 Scores

See *CHOICE*, April 2005, for what was tested to achieve these scores, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Apr 05 under 'Digital cameras'.



9 Features

- **Video out:** A connection that allows you to look at your photos or movies on TV.
- **Manual aperture/shutter:** Aperture controls the depth of field in your picture, allowing you to determine which parts of the image are in or out of focus. Setting the shutter speed manually is handy if you're taking photos of fast-moving objects or to compensate for low light.
- **Continuous manual focusing:** All the cameras in this test have autofocus, but manual focus is useful for situations such as low light and subjects behind glass or with little contrast. Continuous manual focus is more useful than a number of preset distances, as it allows for more precise control.
- **Manual white balance:** Automatic white balance should make sure whites always appear white regardless of the lighting conditions, but sometimes you'll get a better result if you can manually override the automatic setting.

10 Zoom range

11 Viewfinder type

12 Shutter delay

See *CHOICE*, April 2005, for an explanation of these, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Apr 05 under 'Digital cameras'.



13 Supplied memory type

- xD: xD Card.
- MS: Memory Stick; MS Duo: small format; MS Pro: higher capacity and transfer speed.
- SD: Secure Digital card.

14 Batteries

Ni-MH or Li-Ion batteries are rechargeable. However, if you're caught short of power and don't have time to recharge, it's also useful to be able to use normal alkalines.

PERFORMANCE										9 FEATURES	
	2	Automatic image quality score (%)	2 Manual image quality score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Versatility score (%)	5 Viewfinder/monitor score (%)	6 Battery life score (%)	7 Flash score (%)	8 Movie quality score (%)	Video out	Manual aperture/shutter
74	57	58	77	88	71	100	81	71	✓	✓	✓/✓
72	69	73	71	69	54	100	76	72	✓	✓	-/-
72	67	64	72	76	60	100	85	51	✓	✓	✓/✓
71	64	70	70	71	66	100	55	73	✓	✓	-/-
71	71	73	68	62	55	100	80	52	✓	✓	✓/✓
71	59	64	78	82	72	83	60	54	✓	✓	✓/✓
71	63	67	66	74	71	87	92	64	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	59	64	75	74	54	100	66	69	✓	✓	-/-
70	60	66	67	79	58	100	79	63	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	60	63	68	67	63	100	79	74	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	62	65	67	72	65	100	69	61	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	62	60	76	84	58	99	48	50	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	68	71	67	70	57	100	60	63	✓	✓	✓/✓
70	61	65	73	70	58	94	76	51	✓	✓	-/✓
69	69	74	67	50	62	100	71	66	✓	✓	-/-
69	67	64	57	46	83	100	92	76	✓	✓	✓/✓
69	78	78	51	70	62	100	65	51	✓	✓	✓/✓
69	67	67	67	54	74	100	73	41	✓	✓	-/-
68	61	68	71	63	56	90	75	58	✓	✓	-/✓
67	50	56	72	67	62	100	73	70	✓	✓	-/✓
67	67	70	67	56	58	100	55	45	✓	✓	-/-
67	67	64	76	82	52	47	72	48	✓	✓	-/✓
67	57	60	77	65	61	100	45	52	✓	✓	-/-
66	52	51	67	56	73	97	76	72	✓	✓	✓/✓
65	57	56	61	59	68	100	71	48	✓	✓	✓/✓
65	60	62	70	56	56	68	86	75	✓	✓	-/-
65	60	63	64	66	64	81	64	52	✓	✓	-/-
65	66	70	56	55	68	100	56	61	✓	✓	-/-
64	59	64	66	35	60	100	65	68	✓	✓	-/-
64	67	64	65	53	62	93	52	33	✓	✓	-/-
64	58	64	75	70	62	54	52	68	✓	✓	-/-
64	66	66	62	46	53	100	63	67	✓	✓	-/-
64	56	61	74	69	55	65	65	44	✓	✓	-/✓
63	57	59	70	45	56	93	61	66	✓	✓	-/-
63	55	60	77	57	68	58	61	43	✓	✓	-/-
61	57	64	68	48	62	72	55	45	✓	✓	-/-
61	58	64	65	31	45	100	74	48	✓	✓	-/✓
61	58	58	62	55	59	73	73	58	✓	✓	✓/✓
61	59	58	62	56	63	65	74	58	✓	✓	✓/✓
61	64	60	64	51	63	73	58	39	✓	✓	-/-
61	60	66	61	49	65	65	57	62	✓	✓	-/-
61	59	64	50	62	63	71	80	53	✓	✓	-/-
60	67	64	62	57	63	42	64	42	✓	✓	-/-
60	68	73	47	66	62	50	63	60	✓	✓	-/-
60	68	63	45	35	64	100	73	58	✓	✓	-/-
60	53	60	73	41	60	61	72	41	✓	✓	-/-

SPECIFICATIONS										
Continuous shooting	Manual white balance	Resolution (megapixels)	10 Zoom range (mm)	11 Viewfinder type*	12 Shutter delay (sec)	13 Supplied memory (MB) / type	14 Number / type of batteries	Size (W x H x D, cm)**	Weight (g)†	Price (\$)††
✓	✓	5.0	36-432	LCD	0.35	16 / SD	4 x AA	11.5 x 8 x 8.5	547	799
✓	✓	5.0	38-114	Optical	0.52	16 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6.5 x 4	181	549
✓	✓	5.0	38-190	Optical	0.44	16 / xD	4 x AA	11 x 7 x 5.5	367	549
✓	✓	3.9	35-105	Optical	0.40	26 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9 x 6 x 2.3	152	599
✓	✓	4.9	36-290	LCD	0.43	27 / SD (A)	2 x AA Ni-MH (B)	11.5 x 8.5 x 11	435	499
✓	✓	4.0	35-420	LCD	0.24	16 / SD	4 x AA	11 x 8.5 x 9	469	699
✓	✓	4.9	36-432	LCD	0.72	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	12 x 7 x 9.5	353	769
✓	✓	5.0	35-105	Optical	0.31	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	8.5 x 6 x 2.5	154	499
✓	✓	3.9	35-140	Optical	0.67	26 / SD (A)	2 x AA	9.5 x 7 x 4	238	429
✓	✓	3.9	37-370	LCD	0.60	16 / xD	4 x AA	11.5 x 8 x 10.5	451	599
✓	✓	3.0	35-420	LCD	0.60	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	12 x 7 x 9.5	353	769
✓	✓	5.1	28-85	Optical	0	16 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion (B)	12 x 6.5 x 4.5	264	499
✓	✓	7.1	38-114	Optical	0.55	32 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	11 x 6 x 3.5	185	599
✓	✓	5.0	38-114	Optical	0.18	32 / MS (A)	2 x AA Ni-MH (B)	10 x 6.5 x 4	255	599
✓	✓	6.1	36-108	None	0.31	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6.5 x 3.5	203	699
✓	✓	4.0	38-380	LCD	1.10	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 8 x 9	405	599
✓	✓	7.1	38-190	Optical	1.10	32 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	257	799
✓	✓	4.9	35-105	None	0.54	44 / xD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6 x 3.5	203	499
✓	✓	7.0	38-114	Optical	0.34	32 / MS	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 5.5 x 3	183	799
✓	✓	7.1	38-114	Optical	0.20	8 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6.5 x 2.5	168	799
✓	✓	3.9	35-105	Optical	0.53	14 / SD (A)	2 x AA	9 x 6.5 x 4	192	449
✓	✓	8.0	28-85	Optical	0.01	26 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion (B)	11.5 x 6.5 x 5	265	699
✓	✓	4.9	28-135	None	0.10	28 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion (B)	10.5 x 5.5 x 3	201	549
✓	✓	4.0	33-132	Optical	0.13	32 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 7 x 5.5	253	399
✓	✓	5.0	38-380	LCD	0.70	32 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 8 x 9	409	699
✓	✓	4.0	35-105	Optical	1.00	16 / SD	2 x AA Ni-MH (B)	9.5 x 6.5 x 5	217	549
✓	✓	4.9	38-114	None	0.79	11 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	11 x 5.5 x 2.5	139	499
✓	✓	5.0	35-105	None	1.02	32 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 6 x 3.5	162	399
✓	✓	5.0	36-108	None	0.27	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 2	149	599
✓	✓	5.0	35-105	None	0.64	12 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6 x 2	138	599
✓	✓	4.9	35.6-107	None	0.33	9.3 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9 x 5.5 x 2.5	126	499
✓	✓	4.0	37-105	Optical	1.14	16 / SD (A)	2 x AA	9.5 x 6.5 x 4	193	299
✓	✓	4.0	39-117	Optical	0.16	32 / MS (A)	2 x AA Ni-MH (B)	9.5 x 7 x 4.5	259	449
✓	✓	4.0	36-100	Optical	0.22	16 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	11 x 5.5 x 3.5	184	399
✓	✓	5.0	38-114	None	0.01	32 / MS Duo	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6.5 x 1.8	136	849
✓	✓	5.9	39-117	Optical	0.50	10 / SD (A)	2 x AA Ni-MH (B)	9.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	227	499
✓	✓	3.9	39-234	LCD	0.50	16 / xD	4 x AA	11 x 8 x 9	390	429
✓	✓	4.0	35-175	Optical	0.54	16 / SD (A)	2 x AA	9.5 x 7.5 x 5.5	286	599
✓	✓	5.0	38-380	LCD	0.59	32 / SD (A)	2 x AA	10.5 x 8 x 8.5	368	799
✓	✓	4.9	35-70	None	0.56	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 3	132	449
✓	✓	4.0	35-105	None	1.00	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 5.5 x 2.7	146	659
✓	✓	4.9	37-222	None	1.13	14 / SD (A)	2 x AA	10.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	245	549
✓	✓	4.9	38-114	None	0.76	15 / SD (A)	1 x Li-Ion	9 x 6 x 2.5	140	499
✓	✓	7.1	38-114	Optical	1.18	14 / SD (A)	2 x AA	8.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	152	599
✓	✓	3.9	38-114	None	1.20	14 / xD (A)	2 x AA	10.5 x 6 x 4	205	299
✓	✓	4.0	32-96	Optical	0.06	32 / MS (A)	2 x AA	10.5 x 5.5 x 3.5	188	299

ALSO TESTED

The following cameras under \$800 were also included in the tests, but got an overall score of less than 60%. For space reasons we've left them out of the table. You can find the full details about them on www.choiceextra.com.au.

- CASIO Exilim EX-S100.
- KODAK EASYSHARE Z730.
- OLYMPUS μ-mini Digital.
- CANON PowerShot A400.
- OLYMPUS IR-300.
- FUJIFILM FinePix A345.
- SAMSUNG Digimax i5.
- OLYMPUS FE-5500.
- KODAK EASYSHARE LS755 Zoom.
- PENTAX Optio SV.
- OLYMPUS C-370 Zoom.
- KODAK EASYSHARE C340.
- KODAK EASYSHARE CX7330.

A NOTE ON PRICING

All our prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers. However, the digital camera market is very competitive and you can expect to find most of these products at lower prices both in stores and via the internet. It's definitely worth spending the time to shop around.

* If there's no viewfinder you use the monitor to frame the shot.

** Size includes all protruding parts when the camera is switched off.

† Including the battery, memory card and neck strap where applicable.

†† Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August 2005.

(A) The camera has internal memory; you can add a card of the type specified for extra memory.

(B) You can also use non-rechargeable alkaline batteries.

Finding a good pest manager

The issues you need to be aware of when getting quotes for an inspection and termite management plan.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Licensing requirements for timber pest inspectors vary from state to state; only in some is specific knowledge about timber pests required.

■ The trend in termite management is towards an integrated approach, with emphasis on physical barriers and baits using chemicals that are less hazardous than those used in the past.

■ Not all apparent industry associations may be what they seem — beware of what looks like a 'front' for a group of companies.

They can build huge earthen mounds with elaborate tunnels inside, or hollow out majestic trees. But only around 30 of the more than 350 termite species in Australia are of concern to home owners, as they can eat the timber your home is built with and cause considerable economic damage. Most of these are subterranean; drywood termites are only of concern in some restricted coastal and tropical areas.

The subterranean termites that cause much of the damage in many areas around the country are often called white ants, although they're not ants and have little in common with them. They generally feed on cellulose-containing materials (mainly timber), eating the inside and leaving a thin shell for protection from the outside environment.

As they need to stay in contact with moisture, subterranean termites usually build their nests in the soil or in a tree, dead or alive. However, they can travel up to 100 m away from their nest in search of food sources in the bush ... or in our homes.

RECOGNISING TERMITE ACTIVITY

It's estimated one in five homes in Australia is treated for termite damage at some stage of its life — around 130,000 buildings each year. Not just timber houses are at risk, but also brick and steel-framed ones. A 1999 CSIRO study of more than 4000 households across Australia found the materials used for floors and wall framing seemed not to influence the chance of termite attack at all. Temperature and rainfall had the biggest impact, followed by the house's age.

Apart from eating away structural timbers (frames, walls, roof or floor) and making the home unsafe, termites are also known to chomp their way through furniture, paper products, fabrics, clothing, footwear, and even non-cellulose materials such as soft plastics, building sealants and rigid foam insulation.

Much of the damage they inflict can result in considerable repair costs before you've even noticed them. So look out for signs of termite activity — the tell-tale brownish mud shelter tubes they build for protection are the most obvious sign (see the photos, pages 18–20). Others include sagging floors or doors, loose trim, cracked paint or plaster, or power failures, as termites, attracted to the warmth of electrical fittings behind walls, chew through electrical insulation.

Regular and thorough inspections are necessary to detect the early signs of termite infestation. But finding a pest manager who's adequately trained and experienced isn't as easy as checking a licence. "There's so much going on in this industry that leaves the average consumer so confused," remarked one of our Sydney readers, who had first been told there were no termites in her house and then, by another inspector, that there were lots, and it would cost a lot of money to get rid of them.

So for this article we've consulted experts in the field to find out what issues you should be aware of when choosing a pest manager. There's also an overview of the current methods of termite management (page 21); heaps more information on this topic is available on the internet, in books, from the CSIRO and from forestry and timber development departments.

GETTING QUOTES

Termite damage to buildings in Australia has increased in the past decade since the hazardous organochlorine pesticides formerly used to treat termite infestations were largely banned in the 1990s. The new, less hazardous chemicals now used are generally less persistent in the environment and require greater skills of the pest manager to apply them.

With the average cost of a termite treatment estimated at around \$1500 — plus potentially many thousands of dollars for repairing termite damage — it's well worth getting familiar with the subject before organising an inspection or committing yourself to a particular termite management plan.

Phone several pest managers and take notes of your calls. You're unlikely to get detailed information or a specific price over the phone, but you should be able to get a general impression about the company, the pest manager who'll do the inspection — and termite treatment, if one is necessary — and a range of prices you can expect.

Compare the options each pest manager presents, the prices they quote and the professionalism they display, then choose the company (and treatment, if required) you're most comfortable with. Make sure, however, that you're comparing like with like. The various termite management methods currently used (and discussed on page 21) can vary in price from a few hundred to several thousands of dollars. The cheapest you're offered might only rid you of termites in the short term; an integrated approach

might cost more at the outset but provide better protection from future termite attacks.

Below are some *Questions to ask* on the phone when getting quotes for an inspection.

THE INSPECTION

It's recommended you have a thorough pest inspection at least once a year, more often in areas with high termite risk. (According to the CSIRO's termite hazard map, only Tasmania rates 'negligible' for termite risk. Large tropical and subtropical areas in WA, the NT and Queensland, plus an area around Perth, are rated 'very high', and all other states except Tasmania have areas of 'high' termite risk.)

Make the time to be present during the inspection; you'll get more value for your money. Not only will you be there to, say, unlock the basement or attic, but you can discuss potential approaches and any problems straightaway with



Questions to ask

About the company

- How long has your company been established? (Avoid dealing with a pest manager who only lists a mobile phone number and PO box with no address, unless you know or can find out more about them. They may be difficult to trace if there are problems later with the inspection or treatment.)
- Are you a member of an industry association? (See *Industry associations*, page 19, for more on this.)
- Can you supply a portfolio of evidence? (This should include evidence of a current licence and up-to-date professional indemnity and public liability insurance certificates, as well as written references from or phone numbers of recent clients. The sections on pages 18 and 20 on licensing requirements and insurance have more on this.)

About the inspector

- What are the qualifications and skills of the pest inspector? (See *Licensing requirements*, page 18, for information on how to interpret the answer.)

- Has the pest inspector done any ongoing training since gaining the qualification?
- How much experience does the pest inspector have in termite management?
- Will the person you just gave me the information about also do the termite treatment, if one is required? If not, how experienced is that person? (Someone in training is OK, as long as they're appropriately supervised. If subcontractors are used, it's best to find out this whole set of information about them too.)

About the inspection and termite management

- Will the inspection be carried out in accordance with, or exceed, the requirements of the Australian standard? (AS4349.3 provides guidelines for inspecting buildings for timber pests; AS3660.2 deals with termite management in and around existing buildings and structures.)
- How long do you envisage the inspection will take? (An average house should probably take two to three hours to inspect, which includes the time the inspector

spends discussing the issues with you and taking notes. If a shorter time is quoted, ask the company how many assessments the inspector does in a day — more than two, especially with travel time in between, could mean the inspector is tired or rushed.)

- Will the inspection also cover borers and wood-decay fungi?
- Will you provide a report in writing? (A written report is absolutely necessary, so you have something you can refer to when you need to, or for a future negligence claim. See *The inspection*, above, for what a report should contain.)
- If termites are found, what treatment methods do you usually recommend? (Office staff who give quotes and advise clients should know about these. For an overview of what's currently offered, see *Dealing with termites*, page 21.)
- Will you bring any brochures or other information on the products you're likely to use? (So that you'll know in advance about any chemicals they'll use, their toxicity and safety matters.)



To get to the food source from their habitat underground, subterranean termites have built mud shelter tubes over the rendered bricks to the timber house.

the inspector, so that an appropriate solution can be tailored to your needs.

The inspector should bring, as a minimum, a long-handled probe or screwdriver, moisture meter, torch, ladder, binoculars, compass, knife and magnifying glass and may well have access to a range of more sophisticated equipment. They should inspect, if practical, all accessible timbers underneath the house and under the roof, inside and outside the building and its surrounds, garden, fences, trees and stumps and other timber structures and trees on the property, up to around 50 m from the main building.

The inspector should also check the presence and effectiveness of visible and accessible termite barriers and the susceptibility of the property to termite infestation (things such as subfloor ventilation and drainage, obvious areas of damp, etc). Furniture and furnishings as well as stored and concealed timbers are usually excluded.

When you get the pest inspection report, read it carefully and if anything is unclear, talk to the inspector. It should include details of the areas inspected (and mention inaccessible areas not inspected), evidence of termite activity (active and old) and, if termite activity was found, an integrated termite management

proposal detailing methods, costs and an assessment of all options and expected outcomes and limitations.

For a termite inspection of an average-size home in a capital city you can expect to be charged between \$200 and \$400, depending on the building size, style and ease of access. Considering the damage termites can cause, it's a wise investment — as long as the inspection is done professionally by a suitably qualified pest manager and the advice is sound and tailored to your situation.

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

In theory — and in line with the recommendations of the relevant Australian standards — a timber pest inspector should possess a certain amount of technical knowledge and experience and should know about local building practices as well as the habits of termites, how they work, where they're likely to be found and the signs of infestation.

To gain that level of competency, a timber pest inspector should have done at least 40 timber pest reports under appropriate direct supervision, a timber inspection course, and have some competence in units 8 and 10 of the National Pest Management Competency Standards, or equivalent experience. (The units are taught by TAFE and other registered providers; units 8 and 10 deal specifically with inspecting, reporting and controlling timber pests.)

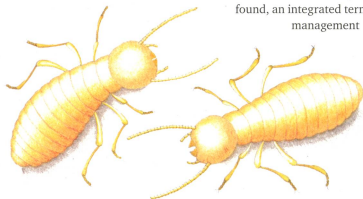
The practice, however, doesn't always reflect the theory. Although training of pest managers is based on national competency units, licensing is state-based, and the states and territories have adopted different minimum requirements. Licensing is usually the responsibility of the state's health department or occupational health and safety body and, to the chagrin of many in the industry, is largely concerned with safety matters rather than with knowledge about pests.

In most states, to get a licence, pest managers must have done a minimum of three basic units (5, 6 and 18) or equivalent. Only in Queensland and WA are units 8 and 10 also required for fully licensed timber pest managers. However, most insurers make units 8 and 10 a requirement for professional indemnity cover on termite work (see *Insurance*, page 20).

So, instead of just checking their licence, ask the pest inspector what experience they have in timber pest management. Having done units 8 and 10 is a good indicator, but experience is important too. It's generally thought that it takes at least two years' training to begin to understand termite behaviour. So if the pest manager lacks formal qualifications but has been doing the job for many years, ask them to detail their experience with wood-destroying insects.

SAFER PEST CONTROL

The CHOICE Guide to Safer Pest Control, by Paul Rogers, is full of information on how to protect your home from common household and garden pests using non-toxic methods. See page 48 for how to order it.



PESTCERT

To help address the problems of sometimes inadequate licensing requirements, the industry recently established PestCert, a professional accreditation program aimed at raising standards in the pest control industry and improving its reputation.

To gain accreditation, pest managers must demonstrate, among other things, that they've had appropriate training, which could mean higher levels of competency than most states require for licensing purposes. They must also commit themselves to regularly updating their skills and knowledge, a requirement which addresses some concerns in the industry that licences are reissued virtually automatically, without the need for professional development, if the pest manager has held a licence for a number of years.

While the accreditation scheme is aimed at all licensed pest managers, not all in the industry are backing the program, disagreeing with the concept of PestCert determining their training needs. Accreditation costs \$145 per individual, but the cost can rise considerably (to \$500–\$1000, depending on the level of training required) if pest managers lack formal qualifications and need training and assessment to demonstrate their relevant knowledge and skills.

PestCert is an initiative of the major industry association (AEPMA), which also funded its establishment, together with a number of manufacturers of pest control chemicals. It's expected to be fully operational, and governed independently, by the time this article is published. To check which pest managers in your area are PestCert accredited, go to www.pestcert.com.au or phone (07) 3390 5228. But keep in mind that lack of accreditation may well be due to reasons other than lack of skill.

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

We often advise readers to choose a member of an industry association that has a complaint-handling process in place when looking for a tradesperson or the like. While that won't guarantee a thorough job,

you'll have somewhere to turn to if things go wrong. However, a word of advice is due about the pest control industry's associations.

The major industry association is the Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association (AEPMA), based in Melbourne and represented in every state and territory. AEPMA says it's willing to help people sort out a problem with one of its members if they can't solve it with the pest manager concerned.

If there's evidence a member company has transgressed its code of ethics, AEPMA says it'll take action against that company. A warning might be issued, or the company might be expelled — a drastic action that, while it does happen, isn't required often, according to AEPMA.

To find an AEPMA member, go to www.aepma.com.au or phone AEPMA on (03) 9597 0664. Bear in mind, though, that only around half of individual pest managers (and about a third of pest management businesses) are AEPMA members.

Considering it's legal to register a company with 'association' in its name, you might also come across various groups or networks of companies that may look like an industry association when searching for a pest manager online or in the Yellow Pages. However, these could be entry portals for certain groups of companies, rather than industry associations as we know them, with many different member companies.

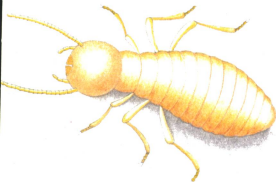
For example, the Sydney-based Australian Pest Controllers Association (APCA) claims to be

FOUND A NEST?

If you stumble across a termite nest on your property, don't disturb it until you've determined an appropriate termite management plan with a qualified pest manager. Once sufficiently disturbed, termites may abandon the immediate area, move elsewhere and then remain undetected.



Metal termite shields, also called ant caps, don't prevent termite activity, but it's easier to spot the tubes as they cross the cap.



KEEPING TRACK

The Building Code of Australia requires that all new homes and extensions have a termite management system in place in all areas except Tasmania, where the termite risk is negligible. Homes built after July 1995 must have a 'durable notice' of treatment fixed to a prominent position in the building (near the meter box or the entrance to a crawl space), listing the method of termite management, date of installation, life expectancy (for chemical barriers) and recommended future inspections.

a "vanguard counterweight" to the dominant association and has a small and apparently highly selective membership base of around 30, spread across most states.

When you search for a local pest manager on the APCA website (www.pestcontrol.org.au), be aware that in some locations you could be limiting your options to the FUMAPEST group of companies. Our search via the 'Find a local pest controller' link from the APCA website directed us to a website run by FUMAPEST (www.termite.com), which only listed FUMAPEST member details for pest managers in places such as Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Canberra, to name a few.

INSURANCE

It's very important to look for professional indemnity and public liability insurance when getting quotes. The former covers the pest manager against negligence claims arising out of inspections, quotations and treatments performed, the latter against injuries and property damage caused as a result of their work.

Choosing a pest manager who holds current insurance should increase your chances of getting a claim settled if problems arise later on. It should also improve your odds of getting a competent pest manager in the first place, as the insurer may require higher-level skills of a pest manager than the relevant licensing body does.

Both AEPMA and APCA require their members to have professional indemnity insurance, but most states' licensing bodies don't — with the exception of



Mud shelter tubes over subfloor piping are signs of termite activity.

Queensland. In fact, up to half the industry is likely to be uninsured, according to the industry's major insurance broker. So, for your own protection, insist on insurance and on proof — ask to see certificates of currency.

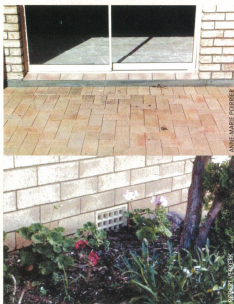
And if things still go wrong in the end, despite all your research, try and sort it out with the pest manager in the first instance. He or she may well do all they can to rectify the problem and uphold their reputation. Contact AEPMA if your attempts are fruitless and the pest manager is a member, or the fair trading or consumer affairs agency in your state if they aren't and you want to take the matter further.



WARRANTIES

Don't be too impressed by long warranty periods for termite control products until you've read all the fine print. For example, it could require you to pay for annual check-ups to keep a 10-year warranty valid, in which case it's hardly a real 10-year warranty. If you come across such conditions, tell the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

An exposed concrete slab, like the one in the top photo, acts as a physical barrier that will bring termite activity into the open. If it's covered with shrubs and plants, as in the photo below, termites can gain concealed access to structural timbers.



DEALING WITH TERMITES

Reducing the risk

You can make a termite trap (or bait box) yourself or buy various traps via the internet. However, we think termite management is best left to the experts, as it involves more than just installing a trap in the backyard, which may or may not attract termites and could give you a false sense of security. We'd recommend getting a thorough professional inspection and then, if you want to contribute yourself, follow the pest manager's advice on improving the environmental conditions to reduce your termite risk.

Fix any moisture problems you might have around the house (inside and outside) — rectifying poor drainage, leaking pipes or inadequate ventilation should be on top of your list of things to do. Then check out your home's surroundings: shrubs or garden beds should be well clear of the building edge and not cover weepholes (the small gaps left between bricks to let water drain out). Access areas for inspection should be kept clear.

The subfloor area should also be kept clear. Don't store items that can reduce the ventilation space under the house, especially timber and other cellulose-containing materials that can attract termites. In fact, remove any wood that's in contact with the ground from near the building.

Physical barriers

If you're building a new home or doing a substantial renovation, put in appropriate physical barriers. While some can also be retrofitted, it's certainly easier to install them during construction. Physical barriers are non-toxic, permanent and, unlike chemical barriers, don't require much, if any, maintenance or renewal. They won't kill termites, but will deter them from gaining concealed access to your home.

Certain construction methods and the materials used can reduce the termite risk considerably:

- Among the commonly used physical barriers for houses built on piers or a brick course are termite shields (also called ant caps). They don't prevent termite activity but bring it into the open, as it's easier to detect their mud shelter tubes on the metal caps.

- Woven stainless steel mesh or finely graded stone particles can be installed in a concrete slab and cavity walls around pipe openings and the like so termites can't get through these concealed entry points.

- Composite systems can be chemically treated plastic or fabric sheets (they tend to be called 'physical' barriers, although they contain chemicals that'll degrade over time, unlike true physical barriers).

- Reticulation systems involve piping fitted under slabs and around the edges of a building with access points for injection of insecticide.

The Australian standard AS3660.1 includes a detailed discussion of these and other termite risk-reducing methods and barriers for new building work.

Chemical termite management

The construction period is also the best time to apply chemical soil barrier treatments under and around a concrete slab or around the building piers or footings. They create a zone of treated soil that may be effective for several years before it needs retreatment. Chemical treatments like these can still be applied after construction, but might require trenching and concrete drilling.

- Many of the chemicals approved for termite control are based on synthetic pyrethroids such as permethrin or bifenthrin. They're generally less toxic than many of the earlier insecticides containing organochlorines (which were banned in most parts of Australia in the mid 1990s) or organophosphates (chlorpyrifos is the only one in this class approved for termite control).

Newer and increasingly used classes of insecticide for treating the soil are fipronil and imidacloprid, which are less persistent in the environment but particularly effective against termites, without repelling them. This means they don't simply avoid the area, and they take the poison back to the colony.

Fipronil is currently being reviewed by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) because a number of reports have raised concerns about the chemical's safety. Adverse effects have been reported in animals (cats and dogs treated for ticks and fleas) and in people who handled the pets (skin

irritation). At this stage, however, no adverse reactions have been reported relating to fipronil used for termite control.

- Arsenic trioxide dust, a very toxic substance and a confirmed carcinogen for humans, was commonly used in the past in termite dusting procedures. It's still approved and used for this purpose, but in recent years it's often been replaced with less toxic insect growth regulators (IGRs) such as trifluralin. This distinctive blue powder is very effective, but may take a little longer than arsenic dust to wipe out a colony.

For more details on the pesticides approved for termite control, check out APVMA's website (www.apvma.gov.au).

Monitoring and baiting stations

Monitoring and baiting is the latest trend in termite management and is a less toxic but more costly alternative. The pest manager places an unobtrusive baiting station (or more) in the vicinity of the house, usually inground. They regularly check the station, possibly reposition it and, when termites are found, add a bait and replenish it as needed. The termites take the bait back to their nest and spread it through grooming, till it eventually wipes out the colony.

Monitoring and baiting stations use very low amounts of a low-toxic IGR (such as chlorfluazuron, diflubenzuron or hexaflumuron). These chitin inhibitors affect the termites' exoskeleton and kill them by disrupting their moulting, without affecting other animals or humans. On current toxicity data, they're a relatively safe group of chemicals.

On the downside are the costs, not only for the station but for regular maintenance. And you might need a bit of good luck, as there's no guarantee the termites will find the bait. So make sure the stations are placed in prime foraging areas, such as around sprinkler systems or other areas where moisture accumulates.

And don't rely on a monitoring station as your only approach in termite management — minimise your property's risk factors as well, or use one together with other methods.

Healthier fast-food options?

We all know fast food is something we should eat in moderation, but when you're on the road or in a hurry, there's no denying the convenience. We've lobbied for healthier choices and now some fast-food chains have more than burgers and chips on their menus — but are they really a better choice?

In the table on the right, we compare the newer options on the menu from **McDONALD'S**, **SUBWAY** and **HUNGRY JACK'S**.

SUBWAY is by far the best pick if you're looking for a variety of lower-fat options. The six-inch subs in its '6 grams of fat or less' range are a particularly good choice.

Some of the **McDONALD'S** Deli Choice range are also healthier options, in particular the chicken tandoori, thai chicken and veggie pesto baguettes. The lean beef burger from the **Salads Plus** range is also a reasonable option, with less than 10 grams of fat and 1250 kilojoules.

The range at **HUNGRY JACK'S** is not so encouraging — the spicy chicken baguette and steak sandwich are the best choices, with less than 10 grams of fat, but they're higher in kilojoules than the healthier options from the other chains. **HUNGRY JACK'S** country chicken baguette has a whopping 34.6 grams of fat and 2764 kilojoules — more kilojoules and only marginally less fat than the **Whopper** burger.

We've also included the sodium content, and keeping in mind that the recommended upper daily limit for adults is 2300 mg, many of these meals contribute more than half of that.

So yes, there are healthier food options at some fast-food chains — but you can't just assume that if it sounds healthy or is touted as healthy, it automatically is. If you're not sure what the better choices are, ask for nutrition information to help you pick.



Product
(from lowest to highest fat per serve, with groups)

Rolls and lean burgers

Product	Fat per serve (g)	Saturated fat per serve (g)	kJ per serve	Sodium per serve (mg)
SUBWAY Veggie Delite 6 inch	3.7	1.1	958	545
SUBWAY Roast Beef 6 inch	4.7	1.5	1150	1110
SUBWAY Honey Mustard Ham 6 inch	5.0	1.6	1310	1280
SUBWAY Roasted Chicken 6 inch	5.1	1.5	1280	708
SUBWAY Savoury Turkey & Ham 6 inch	5.1	1.7	1160	1080
SUBWAY Club 6 inch	5.4	1.8	1210	1230
SUBWAY Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki 6 inch	5.4	1.7	1540	1460
SUBWAY Savoury Turkey 6 inch	5.6	1.8	1160	980
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Chicken Tandoori	7.0	2.2	1400	1190
HUNGRY JACK'S Spicy Chicken Baguette	8.1	3.7	1624	982
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Thai Chicken	8.1	2.0	1480	949
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Turkey & Cranberry	8.2	4.5	1730	883
McDONALD'S Lean Beef Burger	8.8	3.2	1250	665
HUNGRY JACK'S Steak Sandwich Baguette (A)	9.5	3.2	2138	1330
McDONALD'S Veggie Pesto	10.4	4.7	1370	726
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Mustard Beef	14.8	6.5	1760	1350
HUNGRY JACK'S Grilled Chicken Baguette	19.6	3.6	1849	1046
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Chicken Caesar	21.2	5.4	2360	1370
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Bacon & Egg	21.4	8.3	2080	1210
McDONALD'S Deli Choice Italian Supreme	22.5	9.8	1970	1190
HUNGRY JACK'S Veggie Supreme Baguette	23.2	7.1	2249	1328
HUNGRY JACK'S Country Chicken Baguette	34.6	8.0	2764	1319

Salads

McDONALD'S Garden Salad	3.9	2.3	311	106
McDONALD'S Roast Chicken Salad	6.7	2.9	972	454
HUNGRY JACK'S Caesar Salad with Chicken (without dressing)	15.8	5.8	1300	1260
HUNGRY JACK'S Caesar Salad (with dressing)	21.3	5.9	1370	1260
HUNGRY JACK'S Caesar Salad with Chicken (with dressing)	27.9	8.0	1860	1820

For comparison

McDONALD'S McChicken Burger	19.8	3.6	1750	699
SUBWAY Italian BMT 6 inch	20.8	9.0	1880	1610
SUBWAY Meatball Marinara 6 inch	21.2	9.9	2080	1440
McDONALD'S Big Mac	24.9	10.1	2010	800
HUNGRY JACK'S Whopper Burger	39.3	11.6	2740	932
HUNGRY JACK'S Whopper Double Beef with Cheese	65.1	25.1	4150	1440

(A) Not available in all states.

THE BEST THING SINCE ... CRUSTLESS BREAD?

OK, now we've heard it all. **HOVIS** bread in the UK has released what's thought to be the world's first crustless loaf — and not by cutting the crusts off post-baking, as has been done previously. Instead, it claims to use low baking temperatures and a special tin to produce a loaf that doesn't have a noticeable crust. Good news for parents sick of cutting the crusts off for the kids, and for kids who'd prefer straight hair.



Weigh up your options

Many bathroom scales now also measure body fat, but how good are they, and is it something we really need to know?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Body fat percentage is a better indicator of health than weight, and you can best use body fat scales to monitor change in your body composition over time.**

■ **The body fat scales on test generally gave a good estimation of body fat when compared with underwater weighing, the gold-standard method of body composition analysis.**

If you're trying to get healthier by losing weight, it's likely you're hopping on and off your bathroom scales regularly to monitor your progress. While weight can give you a rough guide to how you're doing, a better measure of health is your body composition — essentially the amount of body fat you're carrying relative to lean mass (muscles, bones, body water, organs, etc).

We all need some body fat: to protect vital organs, store vitamins and help regulate body temperature, for example. But the higher your percentage of body fat, the greater is your risk of developing heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. So knowing that you're 'over-fat' (and doing something about it) can be helpful, and if you're on a fitness program, monitoring your body fat percentage is one way to measure progress.

There are several ways to measure body fat. Most involve a certain amount of discomfort or considerable expense. But body fat scales, which look much like everyday bathroom scales, can give you a reading in seconds in the convenience of your own bathroom.

HOW THEY WORK

The body fat scales on test all use bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA) to measure body fat. With BIA, a low electrical current is sent, via the feet,



WHAT TO BUY

TANITA InnerScan Body Composition Monitor BC-532	\$399
TEFAL Bodymaster Vision 79570	\$210
TANITA Body Fat Monitor/Scale BF-679W	\$175
PROPERT Glass Body Fat Electronic Bathroom Scale 3040 TEST BUY	\$79
OREGON SCIENTIFIC High Precision Body Weight Monitor with Body Fat Index GA101	\$180
SOEHNLE Body Balance Chicago GSM-63671	\$180-\$200
SOEHNLE Volga 63674	\$90

through the body to measure the resistance of the body tissues. The current flows easily through water-containing tissues, like muscle, but meets resistance — impedance — as it meets fat. So a high impedance indicates a high level of fat.

The impedance data is then fed into an equation, along with your measured total body weight and personal details that you enter into the scale manually (for example age, gender, height and fitness level), to estimate total body fat, which in all but one of the tested scales (the TEFAL) is expressed as a percentage of your total body weight.

The electrical impulse is so low it can't be felt and is harmless for most people, but all the products warn that they shouldn't be used if you have a pacemaker or other internal devices such as metal plates or screws.

ARE THEY ACCURATE?

All methods of body fat measurement used on living people are only estimations. However, BIA has been

shown to correlate well with other methods, and the body fat scales tested generally give a good estimation of body fat when compared with underwater weighing (UWW), the gold-standard method of body composition analysis. However, BIA does have a slight tendency to underestimate percentage body fat compared with UWW, particularly for people with more body fat. There are also certain conditions that affect BIA's accuracy:

- **Hydration.** BIA uses the water content in your body to estimate body fat, so your level of hydration has an impact on readings. The less hydrated you are, the higher your impedance and so your body fat reading. Simply having a bath, going to the toilet, menstruating, exercising, drinking and eating can cause fluctuations.
- **Pregnant women.** Because fat isn't as evenly distributed around the body as it would be at other times, BIA won't give accurate readings in pregnancy.
- **Children.** BIA has been shown to be less accurate

Profiles

Models in the What to buy list are profiled in rank order.



TANITA INNERSCAN BODY COMPOSITION MONITOR BC-532

Price: \$399

Good points

- Excellent weight accuracy.
- Equal best for weight sensitivity, scoring 100%.
- Very easy to use: clear display with large, easy-to-read numbers.
- Very good estimation of body fat on average.
- Also measures other parameters, including muscle mass, BMR (the minimum level of energy — kilojoules — your body needs when at rest to function effectively) and metabolic age (an indication of the average age associated with your BMR).

Bad points

- Most expensive on test.



TEFAL BODYMASTER VISION 79570

Price: \$210

(Displays body fat in kilograms, not as a percentage.)

Good points

- Equal best for weight accuracy.
- Very good weight sensitivity.
- Very easy to use: clear display with large, easy-to-read numbers.
- Very good estimation of body fat on average.

Bad points

- Second most expensive on test.
- Problems can arise with its 'automatic recognition system' if two or more regular users are of similar weight and impedance.



TANITA BODY FAT MONITOR/SCALE BF-679W

Price: \$175

Good points

- Excellent weight accuracy.
- Very good weight sensitivity.
- Very easy to use.
- Very good estimation of body fat on average.

Bad points

- Only has memory for two regular users.



PROPERT GLASS BODY FAT ELECTRONIC BATHROOM SCALE 3040

Price: \$79

Good points

- Very good weight accuracy.
- Equal best for weight sensitivity, scoring 100%.
- Very easy to use.
- Very good estimation of body fat on average.
- The cheapest on test.

Bad points

- None to mention.

BEST BUY

for measuring the body fat of children — their body composition is different from adults', and body fat scales tend not to be calibrated to measure them.

■ **Athletes and obese people.** BIA tends to underestimate percentage body fat in people with high levels, and unless the scale has an 'athlete' or 'fitness level' function (for which a different equation is used), it can overestimate body fat in athletes.

GETTING THE MOST ACCURATE READINGS

As most manufacturers suggest, for practical purposes body fat scales are best for comparing your change in body fat over time, rather than focusing on a single day's reading. To get the most accurate readings possible, it's recommended that you:

- Make sure you have bare, clean feet.
- Place the appliance on a flat, hard floor.
- Don't take a reading too soon after waking — when you're asleep, water distribution changes

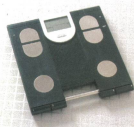
in the body, and some movement is required after waking to stabilise it again.

- Don't take a reading immediately following a meal — it takes a couple of hours for food and drink to be digested and distributed in the body.
- Wait 24 hours after drinking a lot of alcohol or excessive exercising, as these can both lead to dehydration.
- Measure yourself at the same time every day under the same conditions.

MEASURING WEIGHT

Generally, the scales on test measured weight accurately, although given that they all indicate that they give readings to 0.1 kg, some weren't as sensitive at measuring 100 g increments as they should be (see *What about the rest*, below right, for details).

Carpet can cause scales to give wildly inaccurate readings — using them on a carpet affected the accuracy of most models tested. (We didn't use the carpet results in our ratings.)



OREGON SCIENTIFIC HIGH PRECISION BODY WEIGHT MONITOR WITH BODY FAT INDEX GA101

- Price:** \$180
Good points
- Excellent weight accuracy.
 - Very good weight sensitivity.
 - Easy to use — particularly easy for preset users.
 - Very good estimation of body fat on average.
 - Also calculates BMI.
- Bad points**
- The display is less clear than most, and the numbers are relatively small.
 - The pushbuttons don't always respond instantly.



SOEHNLE BODY BALANCE CHICAGO GSM-63671

- Price:** \$180–\$200
Good points
- Excellent weight accuracy.
 - Very good weight sensitivity.
 - Measured body fat closest to underwater weighing method.
 - Also measures muscle proportion.
- Bad points**
- Problems can arise with its 'automatic personal recognition' system when there are more than two people of similar weight.
 - Pushbuttons are relatively hard to push, and pushing them can make the scale tip up.
 - It tips over to the side fairly easily when you put your foot on the glass surface.



SOEHNLE VOLGA 63674

- Price:** \$90
Good points
- Equal best for weight accuracy.
 - Very good weight sensitivity.
 - Easy to use.
 - Relatively cheap.
- Bad points**
- The numbers on the display are comparatively small.
 - While it still gave a good estimation of body fat on average in our trial, it had the largest average difference between its percentage body fat and underwater weighing measurements.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

Most of the other scales were good overall and easy to use, but fell down just in some areas:

- The **WEIGHT WATCHERS** model was the least accurate at measuring weight, giving readings 1.3 kg and 2.2 kg out at 62 kg and 110 kg respectively.
- The **SALTER, HANSON, HOMEDICS, HELLER, TERRAILLON** and **WEIGHT WATCHERS** weren't very sensitive to weight increments, only registering a change in weight once 0.5–0.6 kg was added, despite the display's ability to show increments of 0.1 kg.
- The **HELLER** can tip over to the side fairly easily when you put your foot on the glass surface. Also, its user manual doesn't give information on how to interpret your results.

1 Brand / model (in rank order)

TANITA InnerScan Body Composition Monitor BC-532

TEFAL Bodymaster Vision 79570

TANITA Body Fat Monitor / Scale BF-679W

PROPERT Glass Body Fat Electronic Bathroom Scale 3040

OREGON SCIENTIFIC High Precision Body Weight Monitor with Body Fat Index GA101

SOEHNLE Body Balance Chicago GSM-63671 (A)

SOEHNLE Volga 63674

SALTER Body Analyser Scale plus Body Fat & Body Water % 9140

HANSON Advanced HFA6

HOMEDICS Body Fat Analyser & Scale SC-510

HELLER Body Fat Analyser / Electronic Bathroom Scale BSH75

TERRAILLON Advanced LTFA2

WEIGHT WATCHERS Body Fat Precision Electronic Scale WW70MA

Underwater weighing measures the weight of water displaced when someone is submerged, and uses this value (together with dry weight, height and residual lung volume) to calculate body density, from which percentage body fat can be derived. Because bone and muscle are denser than water, someone with more bone and muscle mass will weigh more in water and so will have a higher body density and lower percentage of body fat. Conversely, fat is less dense, so someone with more fat will be lighter in water.



PERFORMANCE

2 Overall score (%)	3 Weight accuracy score (%)	4 Weight sensitivity score (%)	5 Body fat measurement score (%)	6 Ease of use score (%)
87	90	100	80	85
85	95	80	80	80
83	90	80	80	80
82	80	100	80	80
82	90	80	80	75
82	90	80	90	65
80	95	80	70	75
78	85	40	80	80
76	85	40	80	75
75	80	40	80	78
75	85	40	80	73
70	65	40	80	75
61	30	40	80	80

What about BMI?

Health professionals often use body mass index (BMI) to calculate whether a person is underweight, normal weight, overweight or obese — it's a better measure than just your body weight, as it takes your height into account too. On a population level, BMI (in conjunction with waist measurement) is the method promoted by the World Health Organization to assess obesity and the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. And for most people, BMI is closely associated with the amount of body fat they carry.

But some people's weight and height measurements put them in the overweight or even obese BMI category when in reality they're just muscular (rugby players, for example). On the other hand, some people's BMI indicates that they're healthy, when they're actually 'over-fat', with little lean tissue. Measuring body fat can be more indicative, but still has its limitations (see *Are they accurate?*, page 24).

If you just want a quick snapshot of whether or not you'd be considered a healthy weight, you can use BMI as a guide. It's your weight in kilograms, divided by your height in metres squared. For example, if you weigh 65 kg and are 1.65 m tall, you divide 65 by 2.7225 (the square of 1.65 m). The result is a BMI of 23.9. Bearing in mind the limitations noted above, a BMI of 18.5–24.9 is considered normal weight; less than 18.5 is underweight; 25–29.9 is overweight; and 30 or over is obese.

However, if you want to gauge whether you're losing or gaining body fat over time — something that won't necessarily show up when only weight and height are taken into account — body fat scales are more helpful.

HEALTHY BODY FAT RANGES

A healthy percentage of body fat isn't the same for everyone — age, sex and ethnicity all make a difference. In fact no internationally accepted published body fat ranges exist. As a general guide use this table.

Healthy body fat ranges (%)

Age	Female	Male
20–39	22–32	9–20
40–59	24–34	12–22
60–79	26–37	14–24

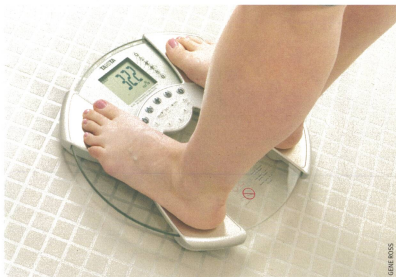
Source: Gallagher et al. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2000; 72:694–701; based on NIH/WHO BMI Guidelines (healthy weight ranges) for whites.

MEASUREMENTS AND FUNCTIONS				SPECIFICATIONS			
Body fat	Body water	Other	7 Preset users	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
	✓	(C)	4	3	China	Tanita	399
(B)		Lean mass	5	1	France	Group SEB	210
	✓		2	3	China	Tanita	175
			4	1	China	Proport	79
		BMI (D)	4	ns	China	Oregon Scientific	180 (F)
	✓	Muscle proportion	8	3	China	Soehnle	180–200
	✓		10	3	China	Soehnle	90
	✓		10	10	China	Salter Housewares	145
	✓		4	2	China	Hanson (UK)	100
	✓		4	'Lifetime' (E)	China	Homedics	90 (F)
	✓		10	3	China	GAF Control	120
	✓		4	2	China	Terraillon / Hanson	129
	✓		10	10	China	Conair	160

What to look for

- A **clear display** with numbers and characters that are large enough to see when you're standing on the scales.
- A **stable platform** that doesn't tip easily when you put your foot on the surface.
- **Buttons** that are easy to push.
- Enough **preset user** positions for all household members who will regularly use the scales.
- A **user manual** with clear instructions for use, and advice on how to interpret your results.

Some scales give muscle mass readings (useful to know if you're trying to build up muscle, for example) or provide additional information to help gauge your health status (such as metabolic age — see **TANITA InnerScan's** profile, page 24, for details), and scales with these extra functions tend to cost more. But if you're just after scales that give basic weight and % body fat measurements, paying more doesn't necessarily mean you get better scales.



* Unless otherwise noted, prices are recommended retail, rounded to the nearest dollar, as provided by manufacturers in August 2005.

ns Not stated.

(A) Also available as model **GSM-6731a Body Balance Rio** — the same technology but a round glass platform.

(B) The **Tefal** displays body fat (and lean mass) in kilograms, not as a percentage. (C) Visceral fat, muscle mass, physique rating, bone mass, BMR/metabolic age (see the profile, page 24).

(D) Body mass index. See What about BMI?, far left.

(E) A 'lifetime' warranty can just mean the product is guaranteed to last as long as it lasts; a specified number of years is preferable.

(F) The price we paid in June 2005.

1 Brand/model

We picked the base model from each brand of body fat scales we found in shops. In the case of **TANITA** and **SOEHNLE** — both major players in the market, with a large range of body fat scales — the top available model was also included to see if you get better performance by paying more. In both cases the more expensive model scored a little higher overall, but you'd probably be just as happy with the cheaper model from a performance point of view if you're only interested in basic weight and % body fat measurements.

2 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Weight accuracy score: 30%
- Weight sensitivity score: 10%
- Body fat measurement score: 30%
- Ease of use score: 30%

3 Weight accuracy score

Measurements were taken on each set of scales using calibrated 62 kg and 110 kg weights, and scored for accuracy at each weight. Both scores were weighted equally.

4 Weight sensitivity score

Weight was increased (from 20 kg) in 0.1 kg increments and changes in measurements recorded and scored. Also see *What about the rest?*, page 25.

5 Body fat measurement score

We measured the percentage body fat of eight people using both underwater weighing (UWW) and the scales. UWW was carried out in a specialist lab by experienced technicians. All body fat measurements for each person were taken within 45 minutes. The average difference in percentage body fat between that measured by the scales and by UWW was calculated and scored.

6 Ease of use score

We assessed the following:

- Ease of reading the display.
 - Ease of programming/using controls (presetting users).
 - Ease of subsequent use (measuring body fat).
 - Foot placement/stability.
- All scores were weighted equally.

7 Preset users

All the scales on trial allow you to program in personal data (gender, height, etc) for regular users.

Entering personal data on most of the scales is a matter of selecting a user number, pressing specified buttons to scroll through a series of numbers or icons until you reach the relevant age, height or gender (for example), then pressing another button to confirm this detail and move on to the next. Once you've stored information under a user number, pushing or tapping the appropriate button or switch will allow the scales to recall your details each time you want to take a new body fat reading.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ It's hard to compare funeral prices, because 'a funeral' means different things to different people — and different funeral directors. However, ask them at least to provide upfront their service or professional fee (and what it includes), a range of prices for coffins, and a range of cremation or burial fees.

■ Make sure you're clear on what is and isn't included in any bottom-line quote you're given — use our checklists of 'The basics' and 'Extras' (pages 30 and 31) as a guide.

■ Many people would like to see an independent pricing authority determine a set fee for a basic funeral service, which all funeral directors would be obliged to provide on request.

It's been estimated that the average cost of a funeral is around \$4000–\$7000, although prices can range from less than \$2000 to tens of thousands of dollars. We rang funeral directors around Australia and found no consistent differences between the states — differences between individual companies are the main factor.

As for city versus country funerals, it can depend on a number of factors, although it's claimed city funerals are more expensive. For burials, the cost of land (and therefore burial) tends to be cheaper in country areas, although ongoing maintenance costs may be the greater cost issue. Country transport distances can increase costs.

ARE FUNERALS TOO EXPENSIVE?

"To be quite honest, I was rather surprised by the cost — based on rumours and so on I was expecting it to be around \$10,000, so for it to come in at around \$4500 was a bit of a bonus as far as I was concerned!"

The cost of funerals has been criticised for rising above the consumer price index.

The funeral industry claims people are now demanding more elaborate funerals and additional services, and so you can't compare 'average' prices

from 1998 and 2004, say (GST aside). In particular, it highlights funeral services for people of different cultures and religions, especially as post-'White Australia' policy migrants from the 1950s onwards reach 'funeral age'.

The industry also points out that some of the costs are out of its control, such as cremation and cemetery fees (although some funeral parlours have bought their own cemeteries and crematoria), and that cost increases should be compared with health and land costs, not general prices.

However, it can't be denied that at least some in the funeral industry are making healthy profits: the InvoCare group, which estimates it has 20% of the Australian funeral market (30% in the states where it operates), announced a \$17.1 million profit for 2004, up 47% on the previous year. Its share price has more than doubled since the company was listed on the stockmarket in December 2003.

"I was curious to know why one particular funeral director was so much cheaper than others. Their hearses were about 12 years old, the choice of coffins was limited, their premises were in a working-class suburb and they preferred to meet you at their offices rather than them coming to your home."

RIP or rip-off?

What's involved in a funeral, and how can you avoid paying too much?

Frankly, none of this mattered, and I know my wife would have approved."

The funeral industry has also been accused of not just supplying but creating a demand for additional services such as grief counselling, 24-hour contactability, fancy mourning cars and catering after the service. These 'extras' may be included in the service costs, whether you opt to use them or not.

In its submission to a NSW government inquiry into the funeral industry, the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW has called for GST to be removed from the cost of a basic funeral service — which is an essential public health service — on the basis that other essential goods and services (such as basic foods, essential health and medicine services, water and sewage) are GST-free. It also wants to see an independent pricing authority determine a set fee for a basic funeral service, which all funeral directors would be obliged to provide on request.

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

"There were a few funeral directors that gave me an exact price from the start, then offered options if I wanted them. These impressed me as the most professional of all."

Bodies such as state government fair trading departments, social service advocates representing pensioners and superannuants and even the Australian Funeral Directors Association (AFDA) recommend you shop around for funerals, and get some quotes. While sound advice, especially for those to whom every dollar counts, in reality it's very difficult for consumers to compare prices — even without the distress and trauma of someone dying.

Customers can get frustrated that an apparently simple question like "How much does a funeral cost?" — is met with "It depends on what you want", and a barrage of different prices for a whole range of items and services to sift through.

From the funeral director's point of view, however, it's like asking "How much does a wedding cost?" — it *does* depend on what you want.

That said, funeral directors should be able to quote you their service fee or professional fee (see *What do funeral directors do?*, page 32), a range of prices for coffins, and a range of cremation or burial fees for facilities with which they deal.

Once there's a service involved, possibly with a viewing, clergy/celebrant, flowers, press notices, hearse and mourning vehicles, music and refreshments, costs become more variable — depending on what you want. Finally there's the cost



of the memorial — niche or urn, plaque, headstone or mausoleum — not to mention possible costs for renewal of tenure some time down the track.

The code of practice for AFDA, which covers many of the largest operators, says members should have a price list available that covers services and merchandise, including an essential care service.

Financial assistance

The relatives of the deceased may be eligible for financial help with funeral costs from various sources, including:

- **Centrelink: A Bereavement Payment** is a short-term payment for surviving relatives of people receiving various Centrelink benefits, including a pension or carer's payment and long-term recipients of unemployment and other benefits, which can be put towards funeral costs. The **Bereavement Allowance and Widow Allowance** may also apply to your situation. Phone Centrelink on 13 23 00 to find out about the eligibility criteria for the various benefits.
- **Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs:** For returned service personnel. They may also be entitled to an official war grave.
- **Health fund:** Some health funds provide a funeral benefit.
- **Trade unions, pensioners' associations** and various other clubs may provide a funeral benefit.

If the deceased has no money in their estate, and no relatives or friends willing or able to pay for a funeral, state and territory governments have arrangements with particular funeral directors to conduct a basic burial or cremation.

While you may find such a list is available, it's likely they'll want to sit you down and talk to you and tailor a package to your needs before talking about a bottom-line price.

An internet search revealed that very few company websites listed any prices. However, some did, and the better among these provided details of what was included in the cost, and listed optional extras and their cost. Of course prices change over time, but many consumers would be happy with a ballpark figure.

"At the end of the day, it's a terribly traumatic experience and what are you going to do — haggle?"

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN A FUNERAL?

A typical funeral invoice will include items from the following list, which we've divided into the 'basics', which meet the minimum requirements for committal, and 'extras'. We've included costs for a ceremony in 'extras', since it's not strictly an essential part of a committal, though almost all funerals involve some form of ceremony.

The basics

These items are included in a 'direct disposition' or 'essential care' service (including staff to co-ordinate proceedings), and fulfil the minimum requirements for a funeral. While they don't include a ceremony, there's nothing to stop you holding your own memorial ceremony at a time and venue of your own choosing (for example, a get-together associated with scattering the ashes).

■ Coffin

A coffin has a tapered head and foot, while a casket is rectangular with a hinged lid. Prices typically

range from around \$500 for a basic particleboard or pine coffin to thousands of dollars for a metal casket. You may not want to spend a fortune on something that's going to be burnt, though it's not particularly easy to find a cheap coffin — many funeral homes don't display them and you might have to ask.

In theory there's nothing to stop you using a resource-friendly cardboard coffin, which you can buy relatively cheaply. However, funeral directors cite potential difficulties in meeting certain occupational health and safety requirements (such as carrying it if it has no handles), and the coffin's ability to withstand refrigeration.

The company LifeArt (www.lifeart.com.au) makes cardboard coffins that meet all health and workplace regulations and have been approved by the Funeral Industry Council for burials and cremations. Coffins are supplied direct to funeral directors, so ask your funeral director about obtaining one (details are on LifeArt's website, or phone (02) 9712 7446). Prices are determined by the funeral director.

It's also possible to make your own wooden coffin, rather than buy one, providing it meets regulations. Given construction time, this scenario is more likely when planning for someone who's elderly or has a terminal illness, rather than for an unexpected death. In such a case, AFDA recommends you choose your funeral director in advance, explain your plans and seek their input so you can meet any additional requirements they may have.

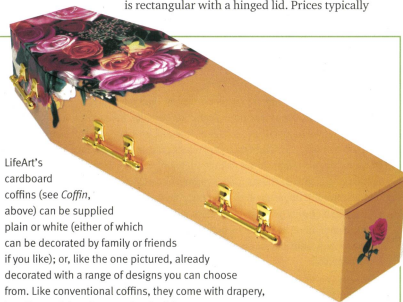
■ Transfers

The body needs to be transported from the place of death to a mortuary, then to the place of the funeral service, and (if the service is on different premises) to the cemetery or crematorium. The vehicle has to meet certain health and safety requirements, and a hearse is usually used.

In an essential care service, where there's no ceremony, the body is usually taken from the mortuary to the cemetery/crematorium at a time that suits the funeral director and the cemetery or crematorium.

■ Mortuary care

Bodies are often washed, dressed and groomed, even if a viewing isn't required. Sometimes embalming may be involved, and in some states it's essential if the body is to be interred above ground (in a crypt or vault); this may mean extra costs. If the body is to be cremated, surgical implants such as pacemakers and radioactive implants have to be removed. If a viewing is required, check if there are any additional fees.



LifeArt's cardboard coffins (see Coffin, above) can be supplied plain or white (either of which can be decorated by family or friends if you like); or, like the one pictured, already decorated with a range of designs you can choose from. Like conventional coffins, they come with drapery, handles and thumbscrews for the lid.



■ Committal

In Australia today slightly more than half of all bodies are cremated, with up to 70% in areas where cremation facilities are readily available (larger population centres).

Cremation: A cremation certificate allowing the cremation to go ahead is required in many states unless the body has been in the care of the coroner. This is to certify there's no forensic requirement for the body (for example, an autopsy if the death occurred in suspicious circumstances). Costs of the certificate vary from state to state.

Cremation fees typically range from around \$600–\$800. This may include some time for a service at the crematorium chapel.

Burial: Burial is usually more expensive than cremation. The main costs involved are digging fees (around \$500–\$1000) and the burial plot (typically \$1000–\$2000, although you can pay less in some country areas, and up to \$10,000 or more in some city cemeteries). It's important to note that when you buy a burial plot you're not buying the actual land, you're buying a right of burial (the right to be buried there).

In some areas you have unlimited tenure, while in others tenure ranges from 25 to 99 years, after which you may have to pay more if you wish to keep the plot (this is designed to overcome the problem when a plot is purchased then not used because the purchaser is cremated, leaving the plot unavailable for future use). The owner of the right of burial can transfer or bequeath the right to someone else.

Extras

■ Ceremony

A funeral service can take place at the funeral director's chapel or in your own church with a short committal service at the crematorium chapel or cemetery; or the whole service may be conducted in the crematorium chapel or cemetery. Or it could be at the beach, a park or in your backyard. Clergy don't usually charge a set fee, but you (or the funeral director on your behalf) are expected to make a donation to the church in the order of \$100–\$200 (an amount will probably be suggested). Celebrants charge around \$150–\$300 for a service, although there are large variations depending on the service.

■ After-hours services

If consultations and services are conducted outside business hours on weekdays, or at weekends, higher charges may apply.

■ Embellishments

Flowers, death and funeral notices in the paper, memorial or attendance book, mourning car/s, refreshments and live music (such as buglers

Prepaid and pre-arranged funerals

Beryl Plummer's mother organised a prepaid funeral many years ago.

"At the time, the service was very good, with a lot of attention to detail, ensuring Mum was happy with the arrangements, down to what music she wanted. She died a few weeks ago, and from the first phone call to the moment I left the chapel, the service was just wonderful.

"There were no nasty surprises, everything was arranged quickly and painlessly and there were no hidden costs. I'm now seriously thinking about arranging a prepaid funeral with the same people myself."

Many people choose to arrange and even pay for their own funeral in advance. There are many advantages to this:

- You can arrange to have exactly what you want at a more considered pace.
- You can relieve family members of the financial burden (if prepaid) and decisions that have to be made.
- You may save money with some prepaid options.

Prepaid funerals are regulated in most states (the exceptions being WA and the ACT and NT) including the stipulation that the money you pay to the funeral home must be kept with an independent financial institution (as a funeral trust), not the funeral parlour itself. If the funeral home you chose goes bust, or you move elsewhere, your funeral can be transferred to another home.

It's very important to check what is and isn't included in the price. We saw an example of a prepaid funeral that seemed to cover everything when it was arranged, but when the final quote came in, an additional note pointed out that the fee didn't cover digging costs for the grave, which would be payable by the family at whatever rate applied at the time.

Also check whether you're getting a fixed quality or standard of service as opposed to a fixed monetary value of the service. For example, will you get a white lily casket sheath regardless of how much it costs in five years time, or a bouquet of carnations because that's all the flower budget allows?

Other questions to ask include:

- Are fees payable to third parties (called disbursements), such as crematorium fees, covered?
- What happens if prices increase by more than the interest made on the investment?
- What happens if the company goes out of business?
- What happens if you die interstate or overseas?
- Can you get a refund if you decide to change companies? With interest? What fees and charges will be deducted? How long will you have to wait?
- Who can terminate the agreement and under what circumstances?
- How are the contributions and interest earned kept?

Another option is to take out a **funeral bond**, whereby you can set aside money to pay for a funeral when you die. The bond is like a life insurance bond and there may be management fees. Also any earnings may be taxed. Amounts up to \$5000 aren't included in your financial assets and so aren't subject to means-testing by Centrelink or the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Amounts more than this are subject to means-testing in their entirety. Any amount left over is paid into the estate. You need to read the product disclosure statement and should get financial advice before signing up.

What do funeral directors do?

Funeral directors see to almost all the practical details to be taken care of when someone dies, from registering the death with the relevant government department to arranging the funeral ceremony. Typical services include:

- Meeting you to discuss your wishes and options regarding the funeral arrangements and service.
- Consulting clergy or a celebrant.
- Making arrangements with the cemetery or crematorium.
- Registering the death after a medical certificate stating the cause of death has been issued.
- Transferring the body from the place of death to the funeral director's mortuary.
- Preparing the body for viewing (if required), including a venue.
- Preparing the body for burial or cremation.
- Supplying a coffin or casket.
- Obtaining a cremation certificate (if required).
- Transporting the body to the cemetery or crematorium.
- Organising a memorial (attendance) book, flowers, catering, music, memorabilia, etc.
- Preparing and placing death, funeral and obituary notices in newspapers.
- Providing transport for mourners.
- Paying fees on your behalf for the death certificate, cremation, clergy, flowers, newspaper notices and other services not directly provided by the funeral director's company.



THANK YOU

Thanks to those of you who wrote to us describing your experiences with funerals. Your stories were invaluable in our research. Quotes taken from some of them appear in italics throughout the text.

or organists) are all common extras, though by no means essential. Multimedia presentations, webcasting, videoing, coffin flags and releasing of 'doves' (or more likely white homing pigeons) are further possibilities.

■ Memorials

The cost of memorials isn't usually included in the funeral cost. Options for cremations include scattering the ashes or interring them in an existing grave plot or a rose garden, or placing them in a niche or urn. Plaques and gravestones for burials can cost several thousand dollars, with vaults, crypts or mausoleums substantially more.

COMPARING APPLES WITH ORANGES, GRAPEFRUIT, STRAWBERRIES...

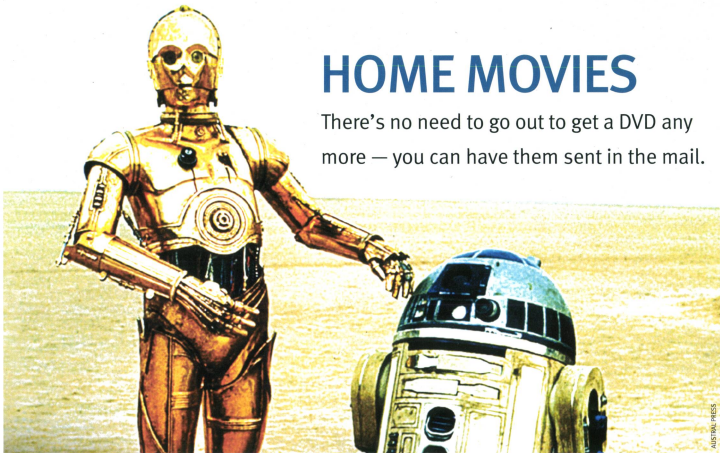
Even knowing all the above, however, comparing costs can be difficult because companies include different things in a 'basic' funeral service. Look at these two examples, where one company quoted us a base rate of \$2170 (including cremation fees), while another in the same city quoted \$2890.

At first glance the former looked the cheaper, but it didn't include transfers (\$165), mortuary fees (\$325), coffin (\$600 for the cheapest chipboard coffin) or cremation certificate (\$77, unless the body was already in the care of the coroner), taking the total cost for the bare necessities to around \$3300.

However, that was with no attendants: if the funeral was to be professionally attended it would cost an extra \$700, taking it to \$4000. Clergy or celebrant (\$160–\$250), casket sheath (\$200–\$250), music (\$200 per hour for live music), newspaper notices (\$125–\$200), mourning vehicle (\$300–\$500), memorabilia (such as \$50 for a memorial book) and catering (\$8–\$13 per head) were also extra.

The second funeral director included a rosewood coffin, cremation fees and certificate, clergy (a celebrant would cost a little extra), floral casket cover and flowers for guests to place on the coffin, transfers, mortuary fees, music and memorabilia in its \$2890 cremation — with attendants. Catering (\$9.50–\$18.50 per person), newspaper notices (around \$90 for five lines) and mourning cars (\$165) were optional extras. A cremation without attendants cost \$2000 — including coffin, transfers, mortuary fees, legal documents and crematorium fees. ■





HOME MOVIES

There's no need to go out to get a DVD any more — you can have them sent in the mail.

Gone are the days when you'd approach the letterbox with excitement — now it's just junk mail or bills. But this can change if you subscribe to an online DVD rental service that mails you your favourite movies.

CHOICE tried five online DVD rental services (there are others around too) in May this year — **BIGPOND MOVIES**, **DVDJAM**, **HOMESCREEN**, **QUICKFLIX** and **WEBFLICKS**. Our 23 trialists from all over Australia each checked out two companies, rating them for website user-friendliness, the range and condition of DVDs available, and the efficiency of service and delivery.

QUICKFLIX and **BIGPOND MOVIES** were the preferred providers, both scoring 75% overall. **HOMESCREEN** was close behind with an overall rating of 70%, followed by **WEBFLICKS** (60%) and **DVDJAM** at 55% (the table, page 35, has all the scores).

HOW IT WORKS

All you need before signing up is a secure letterbox (so thieves can't help themselves to your DVDs) and access to an internet connection (though a dial-up connection may be annoyingly slow). You'll also need to be over 18 and have a credit card, although **WEBFLICKS** lets its customers pay by cheque. **BIGPOND MOVIES** said it may allow Telstra clients to be charged via their telephone bill in the future.

At the time of the trial all the providers offered a free trial of two weeks except **DVDJAM**. It bills customers during the trial period, and credits them if they cancel the service within the first two weeks.

Once you've signed up online for your trial, you can start looking for your favourite DVDs or browsing the provider's list to create your own online queue of the DVDs you'd like to rent. The company then sends you a selection of DVDs from your list, which you watch at your leisure, then send back in the reply-paid envelopes provided. You'll then receive another selection from your list.

The number of DVDs you get at one time depends on the plan you've signed up to. We asked our trialists to opt for a three-DVD plan, meaning they could hire three DVDs at one time, receiving another DVD every time they returned one. Companies offer anything from one to eight-DVD plans. There are no late fees, but you won't receive another DVD until you return one. The plan you choose determines what you'll pay each month. **BIGPOND MOVIES**, **HOMESCREEN** and **QUICKFLIX** also have 'capped' plans, where you receive a limited number of DVDs per month at a cheaper rate.

Overall, our trialists enjoyed having DVDs waiting for them when they got home. One trialist commented, "It certainly beats going into a DVD shop with a toddler" — making online rental an attractive choice for frazzled parents.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Online DVD rental is worthwhile** if you're a regular DVD watcher with an internet connection (preferably broadband), who's looking for a wide range of movies.

■ **It mightn't appeal** if you don't watch many DVDs, you want to watch a particular movie at a particular time, or you don't like searching or browsing online.

FUN BUT EXPENSIVE

Alan is a keen watcher of movies, sport and music. "I loved having DVDs at home, although I did feel pressured to watch as many as I could to get my money's worth."

Alan tried out **QUICKFLIX** and **BIGPOND MOVIES**, choosing to stay on with **QUICKFLIX** for a month after his 14-day free trial ended.

He was impressed by the selection of DVDs available from both companies, and found the sites simple to browse. It was also easy to pop the DVD into a postbox on the way to work, although he admits he occasionally forgot to do it, slowing down the turnaround time between DVDs.

The process of signing up for either service only took about five minutes. However, when he joined **BIGPOND MOVIES** Alan didn't realise that he had to click a link on its website to activate his account. He ended up waiting for 14 days until he realised his error. "It wasn't obvious that I needed to activate my account," he said. He was also charged for the service despite cancelling on the last day of his free trial.

Alan thought **QUICKFLIX** provided good service and delivery, but on two occasions he received a DVD that didn't work. "I think this is a problem with the technology of DVDs, though, rather than any particular rental company." A DVD he requested from **QUICKFLIX** also went missing, but after filling in a statutory declaration confirming he'd never got it he wasn't penalised.

After a month, Alan cancelled his **QUICKFLIX** membership. "Although it was very nice to have movies coming in, at almost \$40 a month it was an unnecessary expense for me."



SEAN ROSS

JOIN THE QUEUE

The providers recommend you create a long queue of titles so you'll get DVDs sent promptly. **WEBFLICKS** and **QUICKFLIX**, for example, suggest you keep at least 20 movies in your queue at any one time. **HOMESCREEN** recommends 12.

This doesn't guarantee you'll always get what you want fast, though. While our trialists found most of the titles they wanted online (89%), the actual delivery rate was lower — about 79%. Within the five-week trial they didn't receive all the movies they'd chosen — if the trial had been longer, this percentage might have been higher.

There were other problems too. One trialist using **BIGPOND MOVIES** complained: "I ordered multiple episodes of the TV series, 'The Office', and the DVDs came in the wrong order, which was really annoying." Another trialist waited over nine days for a movie from **DVDJAM** that arrived damaged and wouldn't play.

Which brings us to what happens if the DVD you've returned gets lost or damaged in the mail. There seems to be no cut-and-dried rule here, but most companies say they'll wear the cost and tend to trust the customer.

Waiting time for a movie depends on factors such as the DVD's popularity, the number of copies the provider has and how many movies are on your list. Receiving a damaged DVD also means a longer wait for a replacement that works.

DVDJAM, **BIGPOND MOVIES** and **QUICKFLIX** have a feature on their website whereby the subscriber can tick a box to say they've returned a DVD, after which the company automatically dispatches another title. Generally, the typical waiting time for a DVD was three days, although it took less time for Sydney and Melbourne trialists and more time in other areas.

DRAWBACKS

The main downside our trialists reported was being unable to control what movie would arrive when. So if you're in the mood for, say, a latest release or your favourite tear-jerker, you're probably better off going to the local DVD store to make certain you get what you want.

If you hire at least eight DVDs in a month, one or two at a time, with most of them being new releases, a three-DVD plan can be cost-effective (if you tend to watch less, a one or two-DVD plan could be a better choice). Online DVD rental isn't value for money for those who don't order, watch and return DVDs in a regular fashion: "For us it would work out cheaper hiring DVDs from our local video/DVD shop where we can get what we want straightaway."

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

"They had most movies I could think of."

"Better than a local video store."

A major plus of going online for your DVDs is the extraordinary range of DVDs to choose from (10,000 to almost 16,000 for the companies we checked) — more than most DVD stores could stock.

Titles are organised in a variety of ways, including alphabetically, in genres, sub-genres or even categories such as 'Oscar Winners'.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

"I liked the reviews by other people so you knew how [each movie] rated..."

Another positive feature of the online DVD rental process is the sites' reviews and recommendations. Some companies provide a written review with the DVD. Others have online reviews by critics, while some, such as **WEBFLICKS** and **QUICKFLIX**, have a system where subscribers can recommend movies to each other.



Profiles

Companies are listed in order of preference according to our trialists. While there may be distribution centres in some cities, all the services deliver DVDs throughout Australia.



BIGPOND MOVIES

www.bigpondmovies.com

Distribution centres: Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney

Number of titles stocked: Over 16,000

COMMENTS

- Rated best for range of movies and delivery.
- Trialists said the site was easy to use and well set out, with information such as account details easy to see (although time-consuming for dial-up users).
- Some trialists were disappointed there was no 'arthouse' or 'alternative' category for browsing.



QUICKFLIX

www.quickflix.com.au

Distribution centres: Melbourne, Perth, Sydney
Number of titles stocked: Approaching 13,500

COMMENTS

- Rated best for the website — good search options and email messages made it easy to keep track of DVDs.
- Turnaround time between movies was quick.



HOMESCREEN

www.homescreen.com.au

Distribution centres: Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney

Number of titles stocked: Over 14,500

COMMENTS

- Good email responses, good browsing and tracking on the website, but not easy to find out account details.
- Some trialists thought there was a poor selection of arthouse/ foreign movies.
- Gives Qantas Frequent Flyer points or free Hoyts movie passes on six or 12-month plans.



WEBFLICKS

www.webflicks.com.au

Distribution centres: Melbourne and Sydney

Number of titles stocked: 16,000

COMMENTS

- Good search engine.
- Some trialists weren't impressed with the range of DVDs.
- Envelopes supplied for DVDs didn't seem very secure.
- Subscribers receive \$10 each time they successfully recommend this provider to friends.



DVDJAM

www.dvdjam.com.au

Distribution centres: Victoria and WA

Number of titles stocked: 10,000

COMMENTS

- Delivery was generally slow except for WA trialists.
- Some trialists thought the range of DVDs was limited.
- DVDJAM says its website is suitable if you don't have broadband.
- Cheaper rentals are offered if you collect a DVD from a CBD distribution centre (Melbourne and Perth only).

1 Ratings

Each of the five providers was rated on three aspects of the service — the website, the range of DVDs and delivery — as well as being given a separate overall rating. The website rating score was based on the trialists' experience of searching, browsing, ordering, tracking orders and customer information. Delivery was rated on how often they got what they ordered, how long it took to arrive and the condition of the DVDs.

Trialists used an 11-point scale for each category, from 0 (very poor) through 5 (OK) to 10 (excellent). The scores were averaged and converted to percentages, rounded to the nearest 5%.

1 RATINGS

Online DVD rental service (in rank order)	Overall rating score (%)	Website score (%)	Range of DVDs score (%)	Delivery score (%)	Price per month of three-DVD plan (\$)*	Website
BIGPOND MOVIES (10)	75	70	80	85	30 (A)	www.bigpondmovies.com
QUICKFLIX (9)	75	75	75	75	37	www.quickflix.com.au
HOMESCREEN (9)	70	65	70	70	37	www.homescreen.com.au
WEBFLICKS (9)	60	65	65	60	39	www.webflicks.com.au
DVDJAM (9)	55	60	60	50	36	www.dvdjam.com.au

Numbers in brackets are the number of trialists who rated the company.

* Prices are correct as at August 2005 according to websites. HomeScreen and Quickflix offer discounts for people signing up for six or 12-month plans, while BigPond Movies offers discounts to Telstra BigPond members.

(A) Capped at 10 DVDs per month.

Juice at home

Don't expect to get a good-quality juicer at a bargain-basement price.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Good juicers** don't come cheap — those in our What to buy list all cost \$169 up.

■ **One of the main** problems with the lower-scoring models is their small chute, requiring fruit and veggies to be cut into small pieces — too much hard work.

Delicious, refreshing and healthy — there's nothing quite like fresh juice. And with summer coming you may be thinking of getting a juice extractor so you can whip up your favourite juice at home.

We tested 10 juice extractors ranging in price from a cheap-as-chips \$40 to a hefty \$530 — as far as we can tell, all the home juicers on the market at the time we tested. We rated them for their ease of use (including how easy they are to clean) and the quality of juice they produce.

Most juicers (all but one in this test) use a rotating blade to pulp the fruit. They tend to make all kinds of juice frothy to a certain extent, so you may have to adapt your taste to this. (The exception is the **SUNBEAM Juice Life** — see *Something a bit different*, far right.) Most can juice a kilo of fruit and veggies in less than three minutes — that's probably less time than you'd spend waiting in a juice bar queue.

NO CHEAP TRICKS

If you want a good juicer that you'll really use (not leave in the cupboard), you'll need to pay for it — although not necessarily top price. Our Best Buys, the **PANASONIC Juice Extractor** and the **SUNBEAM Fresh Start**, cost \$169 and \$180 respectively and produce good-quality juice with a minimum of mess and fuss. That's quite a difference in price from our top-of-the-range model, the **BREVILLE 800 Class Commercial Juicer** (\$530).

WHAT TO BUY

Family-sized

BREVILLE 800 Class Commercial Juicer 800JE	\$530
BREVILLE Juice Fountain JE95	\$210
SUNBEAM Café Series Juice Extractor JE8500	\$230
SUNBEAM Fresh Start JE6400 TEST BUY	\$180
For one or two people	
PANASONIC Juice Extractor MJ-W66P TEST BUY	\$169



The main feature separating the good from the mediocre machines is the size of the chute — where you push in fruit and veg to be juiced. A larger chute means less time spent chopping, and less time taken by the machine to extract the juice. In our last survey of kitchen gadgets, only 41% of juicer owners who responded found them very useful — we think most people would be more inclined to use one that doesn't require a lot of preparation and work. All the models in the *What to buy* list have a large chute.

The other juicers tested have a smaller chute, which means juicing is slower and sometimes messier. Another undesirable trait of some of these juicers is a tendency to leak juice — onto benches, users and, perhaps most worryingly, onto the machine's motor unit. The worst offenders for leaking while juicing were the **MOULINEX** and the **TIFFANY**.

You also don't want to spend forever putting the juicer together before use and pulling it apart afterwards. Most of them are fairly easy to assemble and disassemble, with the **SUNBEAM Café Series**, **SUNBEAM Fresh Start** and the **PANASONIC** being the easiest.

FAMILY SIZE?

The juicer size you need will depend on how many people you'll be juicing for and how much bench space you have to spare. If you're juicing for a family,



PHOTOS: GEMME ROSS

CLEANING TIP

Wash up straight after juicing so the leftover pulp doesn't harden and get stuck in the sieve or filter. Cleaning the sieve under running water with a hard bristle brush is the best way to remove fruit and veg fibres. The **SUNBEAM Café Series**, **SUNBEAM Fresh Start**, both the **BREVILLES** and the **PANASONIC** all come with a special brush to do the job. Juicers with lots of cracks and crevices — like the **GRANT HACKETT**, **MOULINEX** and the **TIFFANY** — are the most difficult to clean.

What to look for

- A safety lid lock won't let you operate the juice extractor unless the lid's locked into place. All the tested models have one.
- The fewer the parts, the easier it is to assemble, take apart and clean. Also check a machine for parts that fit together and separate easily.
- A streamlined design means less food can get trapped in crevices, making cleaning easier.
- Not all models come with a juice jug. Some slot into the juicer, which is less messy as juice isn't as likely to splash onto the workbench; other juice jugs are separate. On models without a juice jug, check the spout height and position will fit a jug with a capacity to suit you.
- The pulp container may be either a cavity around the sieve (inside the juicer) or a container attached to the outside. With an internal pulp container, check that the sieve and its surrounding pulp cavity can be removed together — if it has to be taken apart before removal, it's messier. With an external pulp container, less pulp is likely to build up around the sieve and clog it, and if you want to juice a large quantity, you don't have to stop and disassemble the juicer to remove the pulp.
- If there are two speeds, the higher is usually better for hard fruit and vegies.

the **BREVILLE 800 Class Commercial Juicer**, **BREVILLE Juice Fountain**, **SUNBEAM Café Series** or **SUNBEAM Fresh Start** are the best. They have very large pulp containers — no need to stop and empty it in the middle of juicing — and large juice jugs. Ideally you'd have enough space (and like the look of them enough) to leave these machines out permanently — they're too big and bulky to put away without taking them apart first (see the *Profiles*, page 38, for what they look like).

For couples or singles or if you're short of bench space, the **PANASONIC** is a high scorer for both juicing and ease of use and has the advantage of being compact. You can store it easily or leave it out — it doesn't take up a lot of space. It's also a good one if you have a disability (see below).

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

We assessed the juicers in line with guidelines from the Independent Living Centre NSW. Keep in mind if you use a juice extractor that you'll need enough hand strength to cut up fruit and vegetables.

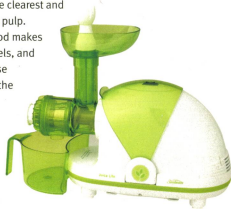
The best overall is the **PANASONIC**, which can be used one-handed and will also suit people with poor co-ordination or vision. See its profile on page 39 for more about it.

Something a bit different

Want to juice wheatgrass and leafy vegetables as well as other fruit and veg? The **SUNBEAM Juice Life** can do it. Unlike the other juicers, which have a centrifugal extraction system, this one uses a 'stone mill' method that crushes the produce, slowly extracting juice. It produced the clearest and largest quantity of juice with the least pulp.

On the downside, its juicing method makes it the slowest extractor of all the models, and if you're juicing carrots you need to use extra pressure to push them through the chute.

Finally, see what you think of its 'space-age' design in fluorescent green — you'd need to like its looks because it'd certainly stand out on the kitchen bench.



TEST: Juicers

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Juicing score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)		Dishwasher-safe	Juice jug capacity (mL)	Speeds	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Weight (kg)*
BREVILLE 800 Class Commercial Juicer 800JE	87	94	80	(B) (C)	1000	2	43 x 21 x 36	6.8	2 (E)
BREVILLE Juice Fountain JE95 (A)	86	94	78	✓ (B)	1000	2	42 x 21 x 34	4.3	1 (E)
PANASONIC Juice Extractor MJ-W66P	84	88	80		na	1	32 x 29 x 21	3.1	ns
SUNBEAM Café Series Juice Extractor JE8500	79	79	80	✓	1000	2	42 x 22 x 32	7.5	1 (E)
SUNBEAM Fresh Start JE6400	79	78	80	✓	1000	2	42 x 22 x 32	4.9	1 (E)
GRANT HACKETT Juicemaster NT-0314	61	63	60	✓ (B)	650	2	31 x 28 x 20	2.6	1
MOULINEX BKA14E Frutti Pro Juice Extractor	59	59	60	✓ (B)	na	1	28 x 22 x 29	3.2	1
SUNBEAM Juice Life JS7300	59	64	55	✓	500	1 (D)	40 x 19 x 44	6.6	1 (E)
SUNBEAM Pure Juice JE4700	53	45	60		350	1	29 x 26 x 18	2.2	1
TIFFANY JE123	51	46	55		500	1	32 x 24 x 21	2.4	2

Profiles

Juicers in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in July/August 2005.

FAMILY-SIZED

BREVILLE 800 CLASS COMMERCIAL JUICER 800JE

Price: \$530 (it's stainless steel)

Good points

- No problems found during juicing.
- Large chute, pulp container and juice jug.
- Two speeds and a large red stop button.
- Very stable.
- Most parts are dishwasher-safe.
- Comprehensive, easy to understand instructions including nutrition information, troubleshooting guide and recipes.

Bad points

- Comparatively heavy.
- Needs to be stored on the bench or disassembled to put away.
- You have to align the blade correctly with the base in order for it to work.
- Very expensive.

BREVILLE JUICE FOUNTAIN JE95

Price: \$210

Good points

- No problems found during juicing.
- Large chute, pulp container and juice jug.
- Two speeds.
- All parts except the motor are dishwasher-safe.
- Very stable.

Bad points

- Needs to be stored on the bench or disassembled to put away.
- You have to align the blade correctly with the base in order for it to work.

SUNBEAM CAFÉ SERIES JUICE EXTRACTOR JE8500

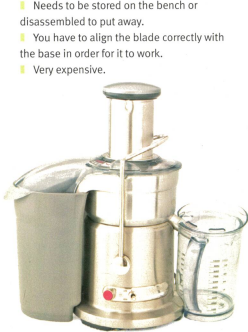
Price: \$230 (it's stainless steel)

Good points

- Large pulp container, chute and juice jug.
- Two speeds.
- All parts except the motor are dishwasher-safe.
- Very stable.

Bad points

- The heaviest in the test.
- Needs to be stored on the bench or disassembled to put away.
- Juice sits in the spout after processing and can drip, or leak when you're disassembling the machine.



Manufacturer / Model	Price (\$)**
SEB	530
am	210
onic	169
am	230
am	180
Marketing	90
SEB	100
am	350
am	60
control	40

- * Includes cord but not juice jug.
 ** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in July/August 2005.
- na Not applicable — no jug supplied.
 ns Not stated.
- (A) The model tested has an 850 watt motor. There's now a model on the market with a 950 watt motor.
 (B) Top shelf only.
 (C) Only the stainless steel filter basket, jug, pulp container and juicer cover.
 (D) Also has a reverse control.
 (E) Plus five years on the motor.

1 Overall score

- Juicing performance: 50%
- Ease of use: 50%

2 Juicing score

We juiced carrot, apple, pineapple, watermelon and orange, including juicing the pineapple and watermelon together to see if a machine could juice a combination of hard and soft fruit without clogging the filter or the sieve.

We assessed the juicers on the following criteria:

- Ease of juicing — how small the pieces have to be to fit into the chute.
- Quality of the juice — whether it's smooth, frothy, fibrous or has a sediment.
- Problems with juicing — jamming, the sieve clogging, juice leaking or spraying, and accumulation of pulp around the lid.

3 Ease of use score

Juicers with a big chute now seem more common, so we

rated small chutes more harshly than in past tests. We also assessed how easy it is to:

- Assemble and disassemble each juicer.
- Use the controls.
- Clean all the parts.
- Collect the juice and remove the pulp.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

There's quite a clear divide between the models in the *What to Buy* list and the rest.

- The GRANT HACKETT, SUNBEAM Juice Life and MOULINEX rated considerably lower for both performance and ease of use.
- The two cheapest, the SUNBEAM Pure Juice and the TIFFANY, didn't even rate 50% for juicing performance and are also less easy to use than the top five.
- Bizarrely, the manufacturer says the TIFFANY isn't recommended for juicing citrus fruits (no orange juice?), grapes and watermelon unless they're mixed with other fruit. Spend your \$40 on something else.

FOR ONE OR TWO PEOPLE

PANASONIC JUICE EXTRACTOR MJ-W66P

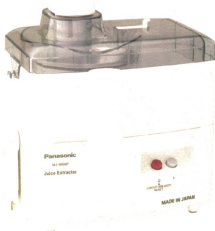
Price: \$169 **BEST BUY**

Good points

- Good-sized chute.
- Large internal pulp container.
- Easy to store.
- Minimal parts, so it's easy to put together and pull apart. (For anyone with weak hands, though, the latch might be difficult to undo.)
- Even though no juice jug is supplied, the spout's a good height for use with other jugs.
- Large, bright switch that doesn't need much strength to operate.

Bad points

- No cord storage.
- Juice can drip from the spout after processing.
- No juice jug supplied.



SUNBEAM FRESH START JE6400

Price: \$180 **BEST BUY**

Good points

- Large pulp container, chute and juice jug.
- Two speeds.
- All parts except the motor are dishwasher-safe.
- Very stable.

Bad points

- Needs to be stored on the bench or disassembled to put away.
- Juice sits in the spout after processing and can drip, or leak when you're disassembling the machine.



Safety tips

- Always use the safety plunger supplied — not your fingers — to push front and vegetable pieces down the chute. Children's (and some adults') small hands can fit down most chutes and reach the rotating blade. Make sure the juicer is unplugged and well out of reach of children if you leave it out on your kitchen bench.
- Take care with spilled juice. Don't let spills accumulate under a juicer, where they could get sucked up through ventilation holes into the motor. The juicer could become 'live' and give you an electric shock if you touch it. Switch off the motor and unplug the cord before you clean up any spills.

'Unlimited' broadband can have limits

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in Queensland received more than 50 complaints in the last financial year from consumers who thought the internet service they received was less than they paid for.

"Internet service providers that advertise the term 'unlimited hours' while not making it clear that a *download* limit exists, along with additional costs if that limit is exceeded, may be misleading their customers," Fair Trading says. "Similarly, a customer who signs up for 'unlimited' broadband should not have their access restricted to slow dial-up speeds at any stage."

The OFT provides these tips for getting a good broadband deal:

- Understand the difference between unlimited hours and unlimited downloads, and check whether deals promoting unlimited hours have limits on the amount of downloads.
- Check whether deals offering unlimited downloads are actually worth paying for, based on how much you use the web.

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CHOICE *Money & Rights* magazine is published six times a year and contains more information

on money topics (and your consumer rights) than we could ever fit into CHOICE.

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Ethical investment comes of age

Sustainable responsible investment (SRI) is one of the fastest-growing

sectors in the Australian

financial marketplace, driven by media and consumer interest. Recent research showed that 85% of Australian and Asian investment managers think SRI practices will be mainstream within 10 years. In response, the Ethical Investment Association is in the process of introducing the world's first sustainable responsible investment certification scheme.

SRI generally uses a systematic approach to choose investments that address labour standards, environmental, social and/or ethical issues. Investment managers may apply what's called a negative screen and avoid industries such as gaming, tobacco, armaments or uranium mining,

and companies with little regard for the environment, corporate governance, labour or human rights.

Alternatively an SRI offer may be the result of a positive screen, which actively seeks out industries with a profitable future that are also good for society and the environment, such as renewable energy, biotechnology, water management, waste management and healthcare.

Another approach frequently applied is 'engagement', where the investors aim to improve a company's performance in labour, environmental, social or ethical issues by means of dialogue or voting at AGMs.

The new SRI symbol (see left) will be available by licence to fund managers, super funds, financial planning dealer groups and individual financial planners. The symbol will certify that a licensee has adopted the

education, disclosure and communication practices required for their particular category of certification.

Australia now has a strong and diverse SRI section with many different products, brand names, researchers, asset classes and investment processes. As a result SRI products can vary greatly in terms of their investment aims and methods. The symbol should help you find SRI products and services that match your own values and beliefs. It doesn't prescribe certain ethical standards or values but should promote informed choice and disclosure to empower investors.

The SRI symbol is to be officially launched in October. You can learn more about the program at www.eia.org.au, and expect to see it on product disclosure statements and marketing material for financial products in the new year.

Cool living

M-M-M-M-M-



It's delightfully cool

Which air conditioner will cool your living room most efficiently?

WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC CS-E21DKRS / CU-E21DKR	BEST BUY	\$1899
DAIKIN FTXD60BVMA8 / RXD60BVMA9		\$2115 (A)
MITSUBISHI MSZ-A24YV / MUZ-A24YV		\$2749

(A) Daikin doesn't have recommended retail prices. The price is an average of quotes we got in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney in August 2005.

IN A NUTSHELL

- We tested 10 reverse-cycle inverter air conditioners suitable for large open-plan living areas.
- There are big differences in efficiency and running costs.

Conventional air conditioners have only two operating modes — they either work at 100% capacity, or they switch off.

Inverters, on the other hand, can operate at various levels up to their maximum capacity. They remain switched on and adjust their working capacity in order to maintain the room temperature. Their manufacturers claim this makes them more energy-efficient than non-inverters.

We looked at 10 models with a claimed cooling capacity of between 6.0 and 6.7 kW. This size of air conditioner is suitable for a large open-plan living area (depending on where you live and the design of your house). All of them are reverse-cycle, which means you can also use them for efficient winter heating.

HOW EFFICIENT ARE THEY?

'Efficiency' applied to an air conditioner means how many kilowatts (kW) of cooling and heating capacity it delivers per kW of electricity it uses.

We tested how efficient the inverters are when operating at 100% cooling and heating capacity (which, depending on your room conditions, they may sometimes have to do), and assessed their airflow range and how easy they are to use. We also designed a second cooling test, requiring them to provide 50% of their measured maximum capacity.

The tested models show big differences in efficiency (see the cooling and heating efficiency scores in the table, page 42), which are also reflected in the yearly running costs. The models in the *What to buy* list have by far the best cooling efficiency, and the PANASONIC also has outstanding heating efficiency.

In the half-capacity test, the AIRWELL, ELECTROLUX and TECO didn't manage to keep the selected room temperature nearly as steady as the others. They allowed a very noticeable fluctuation of about 3–4°C — likely to affect your feeling of comfort.

WANT MORE INFO?

Read our article on cooling options, including a calculator that helps you estimate the cooling capacity required for your room(s). Go to www.choiceextra.com.au, and then to 'cooling capacity calculator' in the index.



TEST: Split-system inverter air conditioners

- * When there are two model numbers they refer to the indoor and outdoor units respectively.
 ** Lowest fan setting.
 † Rounded to the nearest cm.
 ‡ Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August 2005, unless otherwise noted.
 ns Not stated.
 (A) The manufacturer says the indoor unit's noise level has been reduced in later batches.
 (B) Five in auto mode.
 (C) Daikin doesn't have recommended retail prices. The price shown is an average of quotes we got from dealers in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney.
 (D) No RRP provided. The price we paid in April 2005.

Brand / model (in rank order)*

PANASONIC CS-E21DKRS / CU-E21DKR	82
DAIKIN FTXD60BVMA8 / RXD60BVMA9	77
MITSUBISHI MSZ-A24YV / MUZ-A24YV	76
TOSHIBA RAV-SM801KRT-E / SM800AT-E	65
BLUEWAY AS-24VR	63
SANYO SAP-KRV243GJH / SAP-CRV243GJH	66
AIRWELL XLDCI24RC / GLDCI24RC	62
CARRIER H53 PQV080X	60
TECO LS2504V / LT2504V	58
ELECTROLUX ESG21HRIA	57

PERFORMANCE

1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooling efficiency score (%)	2 Heating efficiency score (%)	3 Airflow score (%)	4 Ease of score (%)
82	85	91	69	72
77	80	79	68	75
76	80	69	79	72
65	68	60	62	77
63	64	73	48	60
66	66	63	53	70
62	57	69	59	67
60	65	55	59	56
58	48	65	57	77
57	46	64	58	77

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, based on manufacturer information in August 2005, unless noted otherwise.

PANASONIC CS-E21DKRS / CU-E21DKR

Price: \$1899 **BEST BUY**

Good points

- Most efficient cooling and heating.
- Good airflow range.
- Quietest outdoor unit.
- Five fan speeds.

Bad points

- No fan-only operation.

DAIKIN FTXD60BVMA8 / RXD60BVMA9

Price: \$2115 (see footnote C, above)

Good points

- Efficient cooling and heating.
- Fan-only operation.
- Five fan speeds.
- Second-cheapest to run.

Bad points

- None to mention.

MITSUBISHI MSZ-A24YV / MUZ-A24YV

Price: \$2749

Good points

- Efficient cooling.
- Best airflow range.
- The quietest indoor unit at the lowest fan speed.
- Cheapest to run.

Bad points

- Heating isn't as efficient as with the other models in the *What to buy* list.
- No fan-only operation.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

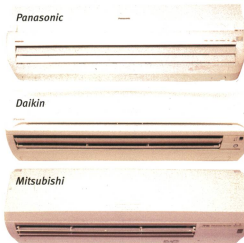
- All the other models aren't nearly as efficient at cooling, don't have as wide an airflow range, and (except for the AIRWELL and BLUEWAY) aren't as efficient at heating as those in the *What to buy* list.
- The CARRIER's remote control isn't as easy to use as the others.
- Access to the BLUEWAY's filters involves removing the lid of the indoor unit, and the model has a very limited timer.

What to look for

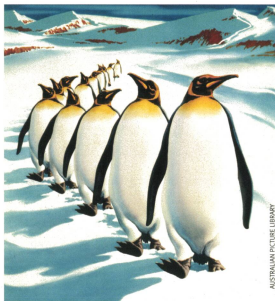
■ **Size matters:** To get the most from an air conditioner, match its cooling (and, if required, heating) capacity to your room. Try the CHOICE cooling calculator to determine the right size for your situation (See *Want more info?*, page 41).

■ **Energy efficiency:** Once you've worked out what capacity you need, compare the star ratings of models of similar capacity — the more stars the better. Note that star ratings are different for heating and cooling.

■ **Airflow:** The air conditioner's fan circulates the cooled or heated air around the room. Ideally, you want your air conditioner to have a big range of airflow settings (fan speeds). A high maximum airflow will help distribute the air in a room more quickly, but the higher the airflow, the noisier and draughtier. So you also want a low fan setting that still circulates the air, but does it quietly — especially if you're using the air conditioner in your bedroom.



PROFILES: GENE ROSS/UTE WEGMANN



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Model	6 CAPACITY (kW)		7 FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS				COSTS	
	Cooling	Heating	Fan only	Fan speeds	Fast operation	Quiet operation	Sleep mode	Dimensions, indoor unit (H x W x D, cm)†	Origin	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	8 Yearly running cost (\$)	Price (\$††)
Model 1 / quieter	6.1	6.7		5	✓	✓		28 x 99 x 23	Malaysia	5	Panasonic	302	1899
Model 2 / medium	6.1	7.1	✓	5	✓	✓	✓	30 x 105 x 24	Thailand	5	Daikin	289	2115 (C)
Model 3 / medium	5.8	7.4		3			✓	33 x 110 x 26	Thailand	5	Mitsubishi Electric	282	2749
Model 4 / medium	6.4	7.9	✓	5	✓			30 x 100 x 21	Thailand / Japan	5	Carrier	339	2080 (D)
Model 5 / medium	6.1	7.6	✓	3			✓	36 x 122 x 21	China	5	Fortunetnetwork	304	1599
Model 6 / medium	6.5	9.2		3	✓			33 x 114 x 24	Singapore / China	ns	Sanyo	309	1959 (D)
Model 7 / medium	6.1	7.1	✓	3 (B)			✓	30 x 106 x 22	China	5	ECP	318	1799
Model 8 / medium	6.0	7.4	✓	3			✓	30 x 108 x 20	Korea / Japan	5	Carrier	355	1960 (D)
Model 9 (A) / medium	6.2	8.0	✓	3				33 x 108 x 22	China	5	Teco	355	1199
Model 10 / noisier	6.2	7.8	✓	3				33 x 108 x 22	China	5	Electrolux	375	1270 (D)

FEATURES (ALMOST) ALL THE MODELS HAVE

Remote control.

Operating modes:

Auto: Automatically chooses the mode required to keep the room at a chosen temperature.

Cool: Pumps heat from the inside to the outside.

Heat: Pumps heat from the outside to the inside.

Dry: Dehumidifies the air (while cooling only slightly).

Fan only: Blows air without heating, cooling or drying. This can be useful when it's not hot enough to justify running the air conditioner, but

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1 Overall score

The overall score is made up as follows:

- Cooling efficiency: 40%
- Heating efficiency: 30%
- Airflow: 20%
- Ease of use: 10%

Reverse-cycle air conditioners are more often used for cooling than heating in Australia, which is why we've weighted cooling efficiency higher than heating efficiency.

2 Cooling/heating efficiency scores

The models' efficiency was assessed comparatively tests requiring them to joustly operate at full capacity (um cooling and heating (s)). We used a test room and e conditions as described in the lian standard, measuring and the cooling/heating output (in 3r kW of power used. addition, we rated the models' ncy in a part-load scenario (50% ir maximum capacity).

low score

measured the indoor airflow (in per second) on the highest and 4 fan settings.

ie of use score

ssessed the remote controls, ction manuals, timers and the of removing and refitting the air s.

ise indoor/outdoor

measured the noise levels of the or unit with the fan on the lowest ible setting, and of the outdoor while the air conditioner was illed in our test room. The table vs which models are comparatively t or noisy.

6 Capacity

Reverse-cycle air conditioners are sold with claimed heating and cooling capacities — you choose one based on the cooling and heating capacity required for your room(s) (see *Want more info?*, page 41, for how to determine the capacity you need).

Shown in the table is the capacity we measured in our full-load test (see note 2). Not all the tested models achieved their energy label claims for either efficiency or capacity in our tests. This is partly due to the fact that the current standard was written for conventional air conditioners, and allows manufacturers some leeway on how to test inverter models. It's currently under review to define the test conditions for inverters more clearly. However, the measured capacity of all the tested models still makes them suitable for a large open-plan area.

7 Features

See *Features (almost) all the models have*, left, for an explanation of those in the table.

8 Yearly running costs

We calculated how much it costs for the air conditioners to deliver 3000 kWh of cooling and 3000 kWh of heating per year when running at full capacity, and based on electricity costs of 15 cents/kWh. The figures are a worst-case scenario for inverter models, as their efficiency improves if they don't have to run at full capacity.

We haven't included standby costs (for power used when the air conditioner is plugged in but not operating), as based on previous tests they're likely to be only a few dollars a year. It may still be a good idea to unplug it (if possible) when it's not in use for long periods of time.

SAFE EATING

From cheap and cheerful to expensive and versatile, we found five high chairs to recommend.

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: nine widely available high chairs from \$49 to \$409.
- Your child should be able to eat safely in all of them, though four had niggling minor safety concerns.

If you're in the market for a new high chair, here's some good news: we can recommend five models that passed all our safety tests (taken from the international standard for high chairs), while the other four on test only revealed some minor safety problems. Our previous test in October 2003 had similarly encouraging results, so it looks as though many high chairs on the market now meet reasonable safety standards.

The five high chairs that passed all essential tests range widely in price and features, so there should be something in the What to buy list to suit most tastes and budgets (see page 46).

The remaining four high chairs have potential finger traps (see What to look for, right). This isn't a major safety hazard, but we test for it because trapped fingers can be distressing for your child, and plenty of models are available that don't have this problem.

In addition to finger traps, the **MOTHER'S CHOICE Summer Check** and the **FISHER-PRICE Aquarium Healthy Care** each had some difficulty with another of the tests.

Our first sample of the **MOTHER'S CHOICE** failed a strength test. The tray broke free during the standard test when a piece of the plastic around the arm latch broke. We tested a second sample, in case we'd bought a faulty one the first time around, and it passed. The manufacturer told us it had also retested five samples and all passed. According to the manufacturer this chair is tested to and complies with the standard generally used in the US (see *Meeting standards*, page 46).

The **FISHER-PRICE** passed our stability test when its seat was in the middle reclined position or fully upright, but tipped over backwards when the back was in its lowest reclined position and loaded according to the international standard test. This chair reclines further than most other models, which seems to make it less stable in its lowest position. The manufacturer told us this chair also complies with the standard used in the US, but for this stability test, that standard is less stringent than the international one.

We didn't score any of the chairs for ease of use, but some comments are noted in the profiles, page 46.



PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	1 Stability test	2 Strength test	Notes
RECOMMENDED: Passed all safety tests and construction assessments			
BABYLOVE Arabella BL50	Pass	Pass	✓
CHILDCARE Eleganza Deluxe 044800-033	Pass	Pass	✓
IKEA Antilop	Pass	Pass	✓
STOKKE Tripp Trapp 400	Pass	Pass	✓
SWALLOW Angelico	Pass	Pass	✓
THE REST: Had problems with one standard test and/or finger traps			
FISHER-PRICE Aquarium Healthy Care GB659-9765	Fail (A)	Pass	
INFA 519 Ultima	Pass	Pass	
LOVE N CARE Techno BP889	Pass	Pass	
MOTHER'S CHOICE Summer Check 8101-ST	Pass	Pass (B)	

ns Not stated.

* Prices are recommended or average retail, according to manufacturer information in July 2005, unless noted otherwise.

(A) Failed with seat at lowest recline setting, but passed at higher settings.

(B) One sample failed this test, but may have been faulty. A second sample passed.

(C) There are numerous slots to reposition the seat in, but the crotch strap only fits in the top three positions.

(D) Refund available if the product is returned unused within three months.

What to look for

SAFETY

■ A **five-point harness** (with shoulders, waist and crotch straps) helps prevent a child from falling or climbing from the seat. Shoulder straps that attach to the seat at shoulder height provide more effective restraint than ones that attach to the back of the waist strap. The buckles should be easy for you, but not your child, to release.

The **IKEA** has only a waist strap, and the **STOKKE** has a four-point harness.

■ **Construction and framework** should be sturdy and robust enough to carry the weight of a child. Push on the seat and backrest to see if they squeak, sag, deform, move out of position or collapse.

■ **Stability** is improved by legs that spread outwards farther than all other parts of the chair.

■ **Moving parts** shouldn't be able to pinch, crush or trap a child's finger, toe, limb or head. Also check for sharp edges and points along the edges of the chair and tray, and easily detachable parts (including stickers) that could pose a choking hazard.

Four of the high chairs in this test have minor pinching or entrapment hazards. The **FISHER-PRICE** and **LOVE N CARE** have removable tray tops that offer openings to pinch little fingers. The **INFA** and **MOTHER'S CHOICE** have slots under the folding mechanism that could trap fingers.

■ The international standard doesn't allow **castors**, but they're a common and useful feature and are probably safe enough as long as they have brakes. Models with four castors should have brakes on at least two of them (the front or back set).

COMFORT AND EASE OF USE

■ Choose a larger **seat** if you're planning to use the chair for several years.

■ A **reclining seat** is useful for younger babies who can't sit upright for long.

■ The **tray** should be secure when fitted but easy to remove, attach and adjust (where applicable).

■ Test any **height-adjustment** and **seat-reclining** mechanisms. They should be easy for you, but not your child, to operate.

The mechanism should be out of the child's reach and require some strength or dexterity to use. All the models on test except the **IKEA** have a range of seat height positions.

■ A **foldable** chair should be easy to fold and preferably lock in position.

■ If you'll be regularly getting the chair out and then storing it away again, make sure it's not too **heavy**.

■ A **footrest** or leg support means the child's feet aren't left dangling, which might become uncomfortable. All models on test except the **IKEA** have a footrest.

FEATURES

SPECIFICATIONS

rs / s	Harness	Reclinable seat / positions	Adjustable seat height / positions	Foldable / locks in folded position	Tray positions	Footrest	Seat width / depth (mm)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
	5-point	✓ / 3	✓ / 6	✓ / ✓	3	✓	300 x 240	9.4	1	China	BabyLove	189
	5-point	✓ / 4	✓ / variable	✓ / ✓	Variable	✓	300 x 220	10.8	1	China	C O White	200
	Waist strap				1		250 x 220	3.9	ns (D)	Czech Republic	Ikea	49 (F)
	4-point		✓ / 3 (C)		No tray	✓	410 x 260	6.8	7 / 1 (E)	Norway	Scandinavian Baby	409 (G)
	5-point	✓ / 4	✓ / variable	✓ / ✓	1	✓	300 x 220	10.3	1	China	Babyco Direct	189
	5-point	✓ / 3	✓ / 7	✓ / -	5	✓	270 x 240	8.4	1	China	Fisher-Price	240
	5-point	✓ / 3	✓ / 6	✓ / ✓	3	✓	310 x 280	8.6	ns	Taiwan	Infra Products	180 (H)
	5-point	✓ / 3	✓ / 6	✓ / ✓	3	✓	310 x 280	9.8	1	Taiwan	Love N Care	199
	5-point	✓ / 3	✓ / 6	✓ / ✓	4	✓	310 x 280	9.2	1	China	IGC	179

(E) Seven years for wooden parts, one year for other parts.

(F) \$39 for chair plus \$10 for tray.

(G) \$299 for chair plus \$60 for cushion plus \$50 for baby set (harness, bar and crotch strap).

(H) The price we paid in May 2005.

1 Stability test

Stability tests for backward, forward and sideways toppling were carried out in accordance with the international standard for high chairs, ISO 9221-1 and 9221-2 1992 (E).

2 Strength test

Parts of the high chair, including the tray, are subjected to moderate force in different directions, to ensure adequate strength of construction.

3 Features

These are discussed in *What to look for*, above.

What to buy

The recommended models are profiled in groups below. Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in July 2005.



STANDARD MODELS

BABYLOVE ARABELLA BL50

Price: \$189 (above left)

CHILDCARE ELEGANZA DELUXE

Price: \$200 (above centre)

SWALLOW ANGELICO

Price: \$189 (above right)

All passed essential tests and are fairly standard high chairs. The table (page 44) has details of their features (harness, seat, adjustments, etc).



CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

IKEA ANTILOP

Price: \$49 (\$39 plus \$10 for the tray)

It passed all essential strength and stability tests and is cheap and light in weight, but it's very basic. You can't adjust the seat back and height or fold the chair for storage. It only has a waist strap to hold the baby in the chair rather than a generally recommended five-point harness, has only one tray position and no footrest or padding. It's also a little difficult to get a child in and out of it.



EXPENSIVE BUT VERSATILE

STOKKE TRIPP TRAPP 400

Price: \$409 (\$299 for the chair plus \$60 for the cushion and \$50 for the harness, bar and crotch strap)

It passed all essential tests and is versatile in the sense that it can be converted into a chair for an older child or even an adult. However, it might not fit your picture of a normal high chair: it's designed to allow a child to sit at the table with the family, so it has no tray and its seat back doesn't recline (it's also quite low and less supportive than the back of other models).

Its seat and footrest height are quite difficult to adjust, and it can't be folded for storage. It's also difficult to get a child in and out of the chair when the bar and crotch strap are fitted.

MEETING STANDARDS

Because the Australian standard for high chairs is still in draft stage, we tested to the international standard (ISO 9221). Other high chair standards that manufacturers use and that you might therefore come across while shopping around include the British standard BS5799, the draft European standard EN1178 (both similar to ISO 9221) and the accepted standard in the US, ASTM F404.

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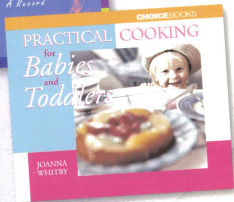
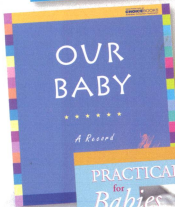
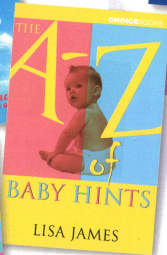
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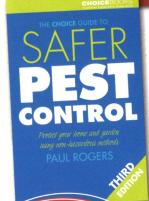
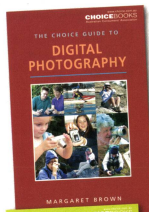
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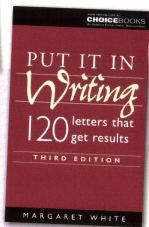
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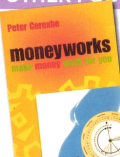
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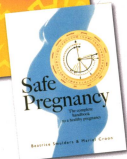
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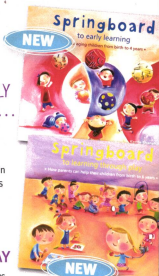
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Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

BOTTLED WATER: Further to a recall notice published in the August 2005 issue of CHOICE, **Hong Australia** has recalled **Pun Chen Lye Water**, 150 mL as well as the originally notified 500 mL glass bottles, sold in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA.

The problem: The water is highly alkaline, and should not be consumed. **What to do:** Don't drink it, and avoid contact with the eyes and skin. If anyone drinks the water, contact your doctor or the Poisons Information Centre immediately. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 9645 1555.

FOOD: **Vihenthi** has recalled **Hello Bee Bee Brand Pon Rice Snack (Gaueteau De Riz)**, 280 g plastic packet containing 10 x 20 g individually wrapped units, best-before date 05-06-2006 and batch number 050606, distributed in the Perth metropolitan area.

The problem: It contains peanuts, which aren't declared on the packaging.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to peanuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (08) 9375 3388.

FOOD: **Manassen Foods** has recalled **Atkins Advantage Chocolate Decadence Bar**, 60 g bar in foil wrapper, best-before date 23/10/2005 with a batch code of L4265/S, and 23/11/2005 with batch code L4296/S.

The problem: It contains peanuts, which aren't declared on the packaging.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to peanuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (03) 9757 5900.

FOOD: **Buontempo Enterprises** has recalled **Organ Fruit Bar No Added Cane Sugar**, 90 g, 3.1 oz cellophane bag (containing six individual bars), all use-by dates up to and including 22 July 2006, sold in NSW, SA and Victoria.

The problem: It contains sulphur dioxide, which isn't declared on the label.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy to sulphur dioxide. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (03) 9776 9044.

FOOD: **Valley Produce Company** has recalled **Paired and Hazelnut Fruit Paste Pyramid**, 150 g red and green plastic container, and the **Deluxe Party Box Fruit Paste**, 320 g red and green box, all use-by dates up to and including July 06, sold in the ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA, Tasmania, Victoria and WA.

The problem: They contain sulphur dioxide, which isn't declared on the label.

What to do: Don't eat them if you have an allergy to sulphur dioxide. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (03) 9553 1059.

CHILD'S DRESSING GOWN: **Harris Scarfe** has recalled **Stylish Sleep Child's 100% cotton dressing gown** by R.J.N., sizes 3 to 16, style B420021, sold through Harris Scarfe stores between November 2003 and June 2005 in SA, Tasmania and Victoria, and Allens stores in NSW.

The problem: It doesn't meet the safety requirements of the Australian Standard 'Children's nightwear and limited daywear having reduced fire hazard'.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to any Harris Scarfe store, or Allens stores in Nowra, Ulladulla or Goulburn, for a refund.

HOT WATER BOTTLE: **Livingstone International** has recalled the **Livingstone Hot Water Bottle**, 2.2 L, batch number No7Y, which is displayed on the top left back of the plastic packaging. The bottle is either red or blue, and has B51970-2001 and 'Livingstone' embossed on the neck of the bottle; it was being sold since July 2004.

The problem: A manufacturing fault may cause the bottle to split in the

neck region, creating a possible scalding hazard.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or post it free of charge to the following address for a refund: Reply Paid 129769, 106-116 Epsom Road, Rosebery 2018, Attn: Quality Manager (REF: RCHW). For more information call 1300 727 204 between 8.30 am and 5 pm Sydney time.

GENERATOR: **Makita** has recalled **Makita Portable Generator**, model G1200R, 240 V, 1 KVA max, sold between 1984 and 1996.

The problem: It poses an electrocution risk.

What to do: Stop using it. Call Makita on 1300 361 690 Monday to Friday between 8.30 am and 5 pm EST to arrange a free modification.

GENERATOR: **Crommelins Machinery Sales** has recalled 240 V portable generators, 1 KVA max, distributed and sold between 1984 and 1996 under the following brands: **Crommelins** (model R1210), **Robin** (models R1200 and R1210), **Subaru** (model R1200), **Dunlite** (model D1210) and **Nissan** (model GL 1200). Affected units may also carry a label on the fuel tank with the production number RG012.

The problem: It poses an electrocution risk.

What to do: Stop using the generator and battery charging leads. Call Crommelins Machinery on 1300 650 659 to arrange for a free modification.

CAR: **Kia Automotive** has recalled **Kia Rio** vehicles.

The problem: Cracking in the 13" steel wheels of some Kia Rio vehicles may develop during long-term driving, which may cause wheel noise and vibration.

What to do: Contact your nearest Kia dealer to arrange for rectification.

CAR: **Suzuki** has recalled **Suzuki EZ Swift** vehicles, model years from October 2004 to May 2005, VIN range: JSAEZC21S0010017 to JSAEZC21S0010297.

The problem: The material in the fuel pump impeller may be swollen by certain fuel properties, causing interference in the impeller chase, and possibly causing the pump to stop working.

What to do: Contact your nearest Suzuki dealer to arrange for rectification.

CAR: **Nissan** has recalled **Nissan D22 Navara** vehicles, with the following VIN ranges: JN1ADGD22A0040194; JN1CDGD22A0040145; JN1ANUD22A0030018 to JN1ANUD22A0030066; JN1CNUD22A0049967 to JN1CNUD22A0050160; and JN1CRUD22A0020896 to JN1CRUD22A0020918.

The problem: The hood may open while driving.

What to do: Contact your nearest Nissan dealer to arrange for rectification.

CAR: **Mazda** has recalled **Mazda E Series (SK/SY)** vehicles, model years from March 2004 to February 2005, within the following VIN ranges: JMOSKWO8100301824 to JMOSKWO8200302940; JMOSKYO200301825 to JMOSKYO200309241; JMOSKYO200301835 to JMOSKYO200302933; and JMOSYEAT100200485.

The problem: The park brake bracket may crack, dislodge and become wedged in the braking mechanism, making the rear brake wheels lock without warning and causing the vehicle to skid.

What to do: Contact your nearest Mazda dealer to arrange for rectification.

CAR: **Mitsubishi** has recalled **UF Nimbus** vehicles, manufactured between July 1991 and December 1992, with a VIN number between JMUFUP45J000020 and JMUFUP45J001609.

The problem: There may not be enough clearance between the LHF brake pipe and the power steering hose fixing clip. Vibration during normal vehicle operation may cause abrasion of components and lead to a brake pipe leak and reduction in braking efficiency.

What to do: Contact your nearest dealer to arrange for repair, or call 1300 553 349 for more information.

aboutchoice

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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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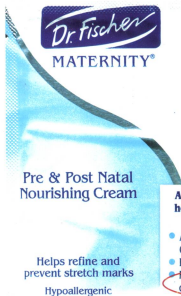
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TIP
To check that your dish is 6 cup, pour 6 cups cold water into the dish. If the water fills the dish you know it is 6-cup.

Dumbing down gone too far?

Black Swan Skinny Roasted Capsicum Dip with its "80% Less Fat" looks impressive, until you read the smaller print: "than butter or margarine [sic]". In fact it's only 35% less fat than their regular roast capsicum dip — not quite as spectacular a claim, perhaps, though surely a more valid comparison than butter or margarine.



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HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to M Troitsin. Thanks also to S Brain, B Thomson, P Hurley, A Goodwin and Tyrone for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.

PEANUTS IN SHELL

So, not just empty shells then? (From a previously unknown country.)

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: IMPORTED INGREDIENTS: PEANUTS IN SHELL		
NUTRITION INFORMATION	QUANTITY PER 50g SERVING	QUANTITY PER 100g SERVING
ENERGY (kJ)	1366	2732
PROTEIN(g)	13.25	26.50
FAT		
- TOTAL (g)		
MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF PEANUTS		